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Reanimating Qohelet's Contradictory Voices

*Studies of Open-Ended Discourse on
Wisdom in Ecclesiastes*

By

Jimyung Kim



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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

To
my parents
Gunhwan Kim and Youngsun Ko



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Abbreviations

AB	The Anchor Bible
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
AOS	American Oriental Series
BA	<i>The Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BCOTWP	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BRev	<i>The Bible Review</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CahRB	Cahiers de la Revue biblique
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	The International Critical Commentary
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
JANES	<i>Journal of Ancient Near East Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JQR	<i>The Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>The Journal of Religion</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of Old Testament Supplement Series</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LBH	Late Biblical Hebrew
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
NIDB	<i>The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OTL	The Old Testament Library

<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RC</i>	<i>Religion Compass</i>
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

The Contradictions in Ecclesiastes and Nonmonologic Unity

It is a cliché to mention how long and deeply Ecclesiastes¹ has troubled interpreters. Already in 1890, E. H. Plumptre, in his book *Ecclesiastes; or, The Preacher*, recognized that “it has become almost a proverb that every interpreter of this book thinks that all previous interpreters have been wrong.”² More than a century later, in *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism* (2012), Stuart Weeks similarly declares that “there are as many interpretations of Ecclesiastes as there are interpreters—perhaps more, indeed, since some interpreters have changed their minds.”³

Among the many issues that have caused such diverse interpretations and controversies is the problem of the contradictions in Ecclesiastes, which is the major concern of this study.⁴ As Robert Gordis notices, “commentators

1 The word “Ecclesiastes” is a latinized word of a Greek translation of a Hebrew word קהלת (Qohelet), the main speaker of the book. Thus, the term “Ecclesiastes” can designate the main speaker of the book commonly called (the book of) Ecclesiastes. However, since Ecclesiastes has long been used as a designation of the book while “preacher” has been the word to indicate the main speaker, I will use the word Ecclesiastes only to designate the book, not the principal character of the book. To identify that principal character, I will instead use the term “Qohelet,” a widely used English transliteration of קהלת, instead of “preacher” because the meaning of “Qohelet” is uncertain and its English translation “preacher” is quite misleading. According to E. H. Plumptre, the idea of calling the main speaker “preacher” originates from Martin Luther who first titled the book “Der Prediger.” See Plumptre, *Ecclesiastes; Or, the Preacher: With Notes and Introduction*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1890), 15.

2 Ibid., 7.

3 Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2012), 1.

4 To be precise, the contradictions that I analyze are properly the contradictions of the character Qohelet rather than all the contradictions in the book of Ecclesiastes. According to Fox, Qohelet’s speeches are presented through “the frame narrator” who appears in 1:2; 7:27; and 12:8 with the characteristics of the so-called “conventional sage” who can characteristically be aligned with the sages of Proverbs. In this respect, the “contradictions in Ecclesiastes” is inclusive of the tension between Qohelet and the frame narrator. The main concern of this study is Qohelet’s own contradictions, and it should be distinguished from the contradictions between Qohelet and the frame narrator. For “the frame narrator,” see Michael V. Fox, “Frame Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet,” *HUCA* 48 (1977): 83–106.

were confused by the startling contradictions in which the book abounded.”⁵ Michael V. Fox states that “one of the first reported discussions of Qohelet” by some early rabbis, the Tannaim, “centers on the book’s contradictions,” and the book was nearly rejected by them for that reason.⁶ Indeed according to Graham S. Ogden, Heinrich Heine regarded Qohelet as the “quintessence of scepticism” whereas Franz Delitzsch viewed the book as the “quintessence of piety.”⁷ R. N. Whybray and Eunmy P. Lee call Qohelet a “preacher of joy,”⁸ while others characterize Ecclesiastes as a pessimistic text. In the preface of his commentary, William P. Brown similarly remarks that “any commentator on Ecclesiastes faces a hermeneutical dilemma that is only exacerbated by the numerous contradictions in the text.”⁹ As Michael A. Eaton states, “the major interpretative problem of Ecclesiastes is to understand its apparent internal contradictions and vicissitudes of thought.”¹⁰

The contradictions in Ecclesiastes have motivated many scholars to deal with the problem of the contradictions, and they have generated diverse interpretations or controversies. One such controversy in the modern study of Ecclesiastes has to do with the unity of the book. Of course, in the modern era, coherence and unity are often assumed to be the same concept. Therefore, some scholars have viewed Ecclesiastes primarily as a compilation of texts with diverse origins. Similarly, others have regarded it as comprised of multiple (primary and secondary) perspectives attributable to Qohelet himself. These two types of reading basically deny the unity of the text. In other words, Ecclesiastes is not supposed to be read from cover to cover as a unified book due to the contradictions. However, there are those who argue that the text is to be read as a unified whole insisting on its unity by striving to explain away its contradictions. Still others, especially from this last group, will insist more fundamentally on the basic conceptual and literary unity of Ecclesiastes, except for the superscription and the epilogue.

Whatever the differing conclusions of scholars, the governing assumption of them all is a distinctly modernist belief that a high level of coherence is an

5 Gordis, *Koheleth, the Man and His World* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951), 3–4.

6 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 1.

7 Ogden, *Qoheleth, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 11.

8 Whybray, “Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy,” *JSOT* 23 (1982): 87–98; Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment in Qohelet’s Theological Rhetoric* (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 2005).

9 Brown, *Ecclesiastes, Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000), vii.

10 Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 36.

essential quality of unity and, by the same logic, contradiction is an indicator of disunity or problem that needs to be resolved in order to arrive at an expected conceptual or literary unity. For Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, however, the unity of a text does not presuppose coherence. According to Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, Bakhtin tried to redefine the standard for literary and conceptual unity of a text by labeling the unity rooted in its coherence “monologic unity,” as opposed to “nonmonologic unity” that is not rooted in coherence.¹¹ Monologic unity is constructed based on single consciousness, coherence, and stability while nonmonologic unity is based on multiple consciousnesses and contradictions, which generate special qualities such as “open-endedness” and a potential for unexpected meanings.¹² Without the final destiny created by authorial intention, a text with multiple consciousnesses becomes a dialogic space as a nonmonologic unity. According to Bakhtin, therefore, the unity of Ecclesiastes does not have to be grounded on coherence and a single consciousness but can be founded on its instability and multiple consciousnesses. In other words, the composition of Ecclesiastes is a nonmonologic unity rather than disunity. The contradictions in Ecclesiastes constitute the text’s nonmonologic unity that is fully capable of creating a character like Qohelet who incorporates multiple consciousnesses that are contradictory and unharmonizable.

From a Bakhtinian perspective, the polarized opinions of previous scholars’ solutions (i.e., unity vs. disunity) can be reevaluated as half true and half false. The disunity-camp correctly recognizes that the contradictions are irreconcilable, but, due to their modernist assumption on the concept of unity, it fails to see the text’s unity. The unity-camp properly recognizes the text’s unity composed of multiple consciousnesses, but it fails to see them as equally valid voices in the text assuming that a unified text should present coherent messages. The disunity-camp’s strength is the unity-camp’s weakness, and vice versa. In sum, the fundamental result of the modern approaches and solutions is the monologizing of the contradictions in Ecclesiastes. The former approaches monologize the contradictions by divorcing the voices so that each voice is its own monologue; the latter approaches do the same by subordinating one or more voices in favor of another single voice so that a single monologic voice predominates. This study, however, contends that Qohelet’s contradictions, which emerge most significantly from his wisdom discourse, are constructed

11 Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 1–2.

12 Morson and Emerson introduce Bakhtin’s own intellectual development using the concept of Bakhtin’s “nonmonologic unity.” For more about the notion of unity, see *Ibid.*, 1–9.

through multiple dialogic voices and that they are best understood in Bakhtin's terms as "dialogized interior monologue." That is, the contradictory utterances in Qohelet's wisdom discourse represent dialogues of unmerged multiple voices in Qohelet's monologue.

In order to demonstrate the workings of Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue regarding his contradictions in his wisdom discourse, there are five main tasks to be performed. In the first chapter, I deconstruct the modernist underpinnings of the usual historical-critical readings of Ecclesiastes and solutions to the book's contradiction. Then, I propose that Bakhtinian categories are more adequate tools to sketch the characteristics of the multiple voices (or consciousnesses)—the voices that have been prioritized, subordinated, or underrepresented/unseen by most modern historical-critical readings of Ecclesiastes. In the following chapter, I introduce Bakhtinian hermeneutics, especially his core concepts, such as dialogue, unfinalizability, and genre. Drawing on Bakhtin's insights on these concepts, I will insist that the contradictions be regarded as equally valid, independent, living "voices" that are not subordinated to one another. These voices are, of course, historical entities. In chapter three, therefore, I will locate Qohelet in his historical context to reanimate the voices. It is not, however, my intention to precisely reconstruct the text's original world and the text's genuine meanings. My goal is to maximize the reader's imagination and creativity in the meaning-making process by letting the reader's and the text's worlds—two vastly separated historical entities—meet and create a new world. Then, the next task, which will be performed in chapter four, is to sketch out a larger discursive background of Ecclesiastes. It has often been proposed that the contradictions in Ecclesiastes represent conflicts between orthodox and unorthodox (or Jewish and foreign) ideas, but I argue that the world from which a complex and contradictory character like Qohelet dialogically emerged cannot be understood in such binary oppositions. Thus, I demonstrate the complexity of Qohelet's world centering around the diversity of the voices with which Qohelet might have had dialogic contact. In the fifth chapter, I identify a range of voices that Qohelet resonates with, and show how these voices shape Qohelet's complex and contradictory consciousness. What should follow in the next chapter, then, is to finally demonstrate Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue on his wisdom discourse; that is, the voices' open-ended, various dialogic interactions and interpenetration in Qohelet's consciousness that are attested in the text of Ecclesiastes. Then finally, I suggest that together all this will enable us to find some conclusions regarding an unfinalizable Qohelet.

Modernist Approaches to Ecclesiastes and Beyond

Most scholars agree that Ecclesiastes has some apparent contradictions, but they have varying opinions regarding the number and nature of Qohelet's contradictions. For J. A. Loader, for instance, "everything in his [Qohelet's] book is marked by opposites and tensions—from the broad perspectives of the background to the fine subunits of the separate poems."¹ According to James L. Crenshaw, there are seven recognizable topics on which Qohelet shows contradictory ideas.² First, Qohelet both acknowledges and denies divine actions (3:11, 14; 7:18, 26; 11:5 versus 5:1; 8:17). Second, concerning the value of life, Qohelet at times values death more than life (2:17; 4:2), but he also accepts that life is better than death (9:4–6). Third, the usefulness of wisdom is both rejected and affirmed by Qohelet (1:17–18; 2:13–16 versus 7:11, 19; 9:16–18). Fourth, pursuing pleasure, which Qohelet believes to be foolish (2:2–3, 10–11), is also the only good aspect of human life for Qohelet (2:24–26; 5:19; 8:15). Fifth, work, for Qohelet, is both unprofitable (1:13–14; 2:11, 18; 3:10; 4:6) and God's gift (5:18). Sixth, Qohelet evaluates women as both valuable (9:9) and worthless (7:27–28). Lastly, in terms of the existence of retribution, at points his words seem to affirm retribution to be at work in the world; at other points he appears to call its efficacy into question (8:10–14; 9:2–3 versus 7:18, 26; 11:9). By contrast, for Fox, the indisputable contradictions in Ecclesiastes relate to only two themes: God's justice/injustice; and the absurdity/goodness of toil and pleasure.³

What can be inferred from this scholarly discourse is that various view points of readers are always involved with the task of identifying the contradictions. Therefore, contradiction is not merely a juxtaposition of two absolutely opposing statements as the reader's role is a significant part of recognizing and denying contradiction. Thus, as mentioned, there can be no definitive list of the contradictions in Ecclesiastes. Disagreeing about the number and nature of Qohelet's contradictions, scholars, as intimated above, have diverged in the way that they have sought to understand or explain the contradictions.

1 Loader, *Ecclesiastes: A Practical Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 13.

2 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 46–47.

3 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 51, 121.

In general two modes of analysis can be identified in the scholarly effort to come to terms with Qohelet's contradictions. The first is to take the contradictions as they stand without removing the tension and insist on the fundamental disunity of the text. To do so, this mode of reading explains the contradictions, that is, lack of coherency and lack of unity in the text, by positing distinct authors or sources for the contradictory statements. The second seeks to affirm the text's coherence and unity by harmonizing or explaining away the contradictions. Both modes of interpretation recognize the text's contradictions and privilege modernist standards of coherence and unity in their analysis and solutions for understanding the text's contradictions.

1 Separating the Contradictions as Topical Units and Editorial Processes

The first solution to Qohelet's incoherency takes the contradictions as separate topical units, perhaps from Qohelet, but never intended to be read together as a single coherent statement. Scholars such as Otto Eissfeldt, Kurt Galling, W. Zimmerli, and Oswald Loretz approach the text as a collection of topical units that do not present careful logical development and which are not meant to be read in relation to each other.⁴ For example, Loretz believes that the text is composed of seventy-one distinct topoi structured within the prologue (1:1–3) and epilogue (12:8–14).⁵ The major topoi that Loretz finds in the text include (1) unknowability of divine work, (2) name, memory, and fame, (3) toil and trouble in human life, (4) powerless and helpless human condition,

4 Eissfeldt, "Der Prediger," in *Einleitung in Das Alte Testament: Unter Einschluß Der Apokryphen Und Pseudepigraphen Sowie Der Apokryphen—Und Pseudepigraphenartigen Qumrān-Schriften*, 3rd ed. Neue theologische Grundrisse (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr, 1964), 664–77; Galling, "Der Prediger," in *Die Fünf Megilloth*, HAT (Tübingen: Morh Siebeck, 1969), 73–125; Zimmerli, "Das Buch Kohelet: Traktat Oder Sentenzensammlung?," VT 24, no. 2 (1974): 221–30; Loretz, *Qohelet Und Der Alte Orient: Untersuchungen Zu Stil Und Theologischer Thematik Des Buches Qohelet* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964). For a translation of Eissfeldt's work, see Eissfeldt, "Ecclesiastes (Koheleth)," in *The Old Testament: An Introduction, Including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and Also the Works of Similar Type From Qumran: The History of the Formation of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 491–500.

5 According to Loretz, those topoi are also found in biblical and other Semitic old texts, such as Proverbs, Job, Sirach, Baruch, Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit, Epic of Gilgamesh, Ahiqar, and Babylonian Theodicy. Through his comparison with diverse ancient texts, Loretz tries to demonstrate Qohelet's close affinity with those texts and to suggest that the text represents Qohelet's piety for a mysterious God, but not skepticism, pessimism, determinism, or optimism. Loretz, *Qohelet Und Der Alte Orient*, 196–212.

(5) enjoyment of life, (6) wisdom and folly, and (7) death. Though Loretz claims to recognize the “thematic unity” of the text through its use of the keyword *הבל* (*Windhauch* or breath of wind),⁶ the “thematic unity” of Eccl 1:12–12:7 that Loretz recognizes ultimately does not enable him to read the text as a unified whole precisely because it is composed of conflicting or contradictory units ostensibly organized by nothing more than the keyword *הבל*. Eissfeldt also similarly argues that the book is “a loose collocation of a series of reflections” composed of “exhortations,” “generally applicable reflections,” and “individual wisdom sayings,” the units of which are sometimes loosely related but often clearly separable. Therefore it is a loose collocation of those elements, but never a logical treatise that is meant to be read as a unified whole.⁷

Another approach in the first mode of analysis is to regard the diversity in the text not as a series of distinct *topoi* perhaps gathered by Qohelet himself but to understand the diverse perspectives or contradictions in the book to be a result of multiple editorial hands, each leaving its distinctive mark. Carl Siegfried, A. H. McNeile, Tremper Longman III, Crenshaw, and George Aaron Barton belong to this group.⁸ For example, assuming that Qohelet is an unconventional skeptical thinker, Barton recognizes two distinctive editorial activities that he designates as *Hokma* glosses and *Chasid* glosses respectively. According to Barton, *Hokma* glosses frequently interrupt Qohelet’s thoughts with proverbial sayings though these do not always contradict Qohelet’s voice, while *Chasid* glosses are responsible for making the text more conventional and orthodox.⁹ In this manner, the contradictions are attributed to different origins rather than to Qohelet himself, and no longer pose problems for modern readers who expect Qohelet to be a coherent character.

The first mode of analysis that takes the contradictions as they stand explains that the contradictions are not meant to be read as a whole and separates the conflicted ideas. While it should be noted that the approaches in the first mode of analysis make the contradictions clear, it cannot handle the text as a whole. This mode of analysis fails to answer the question that rises quite naturally: Why should those orthodox-izing editors trouble to edit such

6 Ibid., 135–300.

7 Eissfeldt, “Der Prediger,” 668–70. Cf. Eissfeldt, “Ecclesiastes (Koheleth),” 493–94.

8 Siegfried, *Prediger Und Hoheslied: Übersetzt Und Erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1898); McNeile, *An Introduction to Ecclesiastes, with Notes and Appendices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904); Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*; Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1998); Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908).

9 Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 43–50.

an unorthodox text without making the text coherently orthodox?¹⁰ In this mode of analysis, the book is more of an object of analysis than a “book” to be appreciated, and there lies its limitation.

2 Harmonizing the Contradictions or Explaining Them Away

The second mode of analysis is to make the contradictory statements coherent by emphasizing one perspective over the other. Characteristically, this type is quite opposite to the former type because it does not take the contradictions as they stand but enables the reader to take the text as a whole.¹¹ Three strategies belong to this second mode of analysis, but, the first—the quotation hypothesis—is the most influential and common strategy for understanding or resolving Qohelet’s contradictions.

The quotation hypothesis regards certain statements in the text as Qohelet’s quotations of others rather than Qohelet’s own words. According to Christian D. Ginsburg, for example, interpreters from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries understood the contradictions in the text as a conversation between “calm teacher” or “warning teacher” and “exhausted/passionate inquirer” or “hasty youth.” Yet they took the main message of the book to be ultimately from a mature sage.¹² Among more recent interpreters, Gordis is the one who most vigorously endeavors to promote this view, and Whybray adopts and develops it even further. Instead of positing multiple editorial processes at work on Qohelet’s text, Gordis believes that Qohelet extensively quotes other authors and viewpoints, as other wisdom texts also frequently

10 This question was, in fact, asked by Gordis in 1951 and greatly challenged the mode of analysis introduced above. Gordis asks “why the book was deemed worthy of this effort to ‘legitimize’ it, when it could so easily have been suppressed” just like many other Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal works that were discarded despite their often significant orthodox characteristics. Gordis, *Koheleth, the Man and His World*, 71.

11 Again, it should be noted that, in many cases, scholars use not just one mode of analysis. Rather, they blend multiple solutions from both modes of analysis with their own analytic observations.

12 Ginsburg, *Koheleth, Commonly Called the Book of Ecclesiastes* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), 84, 165, 184–86, 192. Ginsburg occasionally does not provide the sources that he cites, but based on the given information in Ginsburg’s commentary and Bernard Maurer’s PhD dissertation, the older dialogic readings are from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Maurer, “The Book of Ecclesiastes as a Derash of Genesis 1–4: A Study in Old Testament Literary Dependency” (PhD dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 206.

do.¹³ For example, concerning Eccl 4:5–6, where the text exhibits conflicted ideas about the virtue of diligence, Gordis argues that Qohelet quotes a statement that expresses the virtue of diligence or hard work (or the avoidance of sloth) in v. 5 and repudiates it by promoting, in his own voice, a respite from labor in v. 6.

(5) הכסיל חבק את־ידיו ואכל את־בשרו
(6) טוב מלא כף נחת ממלא הפנים עמל ורעות רוח (Eccl 4:5–6)

(5) The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.

(6) Better is a handful of quietness, than both hands full of labour and striving after wind.¹⁴

Gordis admits that it is not possible to precisely identify what are the quoted words and what are Qohelet's own words since Qohelet himself seems to be capable of creating conventional sayings, not to mention that there are no external markers of quotations. Thus, Gordis himself calls his reading a "quotation hypothesis" rather than a theory.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Whybray adopts Gordis's reading and tries to prove through his analyses of forms, themes, and language of the text that Qohelet indeed quotes older wisdom sayings in his speeches, though the sources of which are unknown, to undermine traditional wisdom traditions.¹⁶

The second strategy that insists on the unity and coherence of Qohelet is to minimize certain aspects of the text in favor of a dominant view and regard

13 Robert Gordis, "Quotations in Wisdom Literature," *JQR* 30, no. 2 (1939): 123–47; Gordis, "Quotations as a Literary Usage in Biblical, Rabbinic and Oriental Literature," *HUCA* 22 (1949): 157–219; Gordis, *Koheleth, the Man and His World*.

14 The translation is Gordis's. See Gordis, "Quotations in Wisdom Literature," 138. For Gordis, Qohelet uses quotations for three main reasons: (1) simply to agree with them (7:4, 7, 8; 10:2, 8, 9; 11:1); (2) to interpret and explain them in his own way (2:13–14; 4:9–12; 5:9; 7:2; 8:2–4, 5–6, 11–14; 9:4–6); and (3) to disagree or reject them (4:5–6; 9:16, 18).

15 *Ibid.*, 129.

16 R. N. Whybray, "The Identification and Use of Quotations in Ecclesiastes," in *Congress Volume: Vienna, 1980*, ed. John A. Emerton, VTSup 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 435–51. Whybray argues that Qohelet sometimes quotes traditional wisdom sayings he fully agrees with. For example, Whybray believes that Qohelet accepts traditional ideas in 10:2–3, 12–14; 7:5–6. However, a significant drawback of his argument is that Qohelet criticizes those ideas to which Whybray believes Qohelet gives "unqualified approval." Referring to 2:12–17, for example, Whybray admits that Qohelet supports the superiority of wisdom over folly, but Qohelet, in fact, challenges the very idea by lamenting the same fate of all in v. 15. In 9:13–10:1, again, Qohelet talks about the advantages of wisdom but, at the same time, weakens it.

the contradictions to be the progression of thoughts. Scholars who adopt this strategy include H. L. Ginsberg, A. Bea, and Brown.¹⁷ Ginsberg, for example, understands that Ecclesiastes shows a development of thought and this “heterodox” thinker Qohelet eventually commends the enjoyment of life, which is only absurd otherwise.¹⁸ With this strategy, the reader is to take the most developed ideas as the book’s final message. In a similar vein, Brown regards the contradictions as “provisional” and “continually transformed” reflections on Qohelet’s life journey, which moves from negative to positive instructions.¹⁹ Though Brown argues that the second half of the book shows the more developed and mature thoughts of Qohelet, he warns his readers not to hastily regard any part of Qohelet’s ideas as the conclusion of the book. In this respect, Brown’s understanding corresponds to what I am going to argue in this project since I try to promote the unfinalizability of who Qohelet is and what Qohelet says. However, his position is ambiguous because he certainly prioritizes “the positive instructions” over the negative ones even as he rejects a specific point of view as its final message.

The third strategy to make the text coherent is to recognize key themes made evident through the literal unity of the book. Addison G. Wright and Loader are prominent in this approach. For Loader, the contradictions in Qohelet are, as we noted, persistent throughout the book. Yet it is precisely through these contradictions, which constitute “polar structures”²⁰ or a governing pattern of Qohelet’s rhetoric, that coherence can be discerned. Qohelet’s pessimistic perspective, Loader claims, is consistently compared with and contrasted to a more positive perspective. Taking pessimistic statements as the main messages of the book, Loader subordinates the positive perspective to the pessimistic one to make the text a coherent whole.

A. Wright’s structural analysis is also worth mentioning as an example of the third strategy. According to Fox, among the numerous structural analyses of Ecclesiastes, “few proposals have persuaded anyone but the authors,

17 Ginsberg, “The Structure and Contents of the Book of Koheleth,” in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas, VTSup 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 138–49; Bea, *Liber Ecclesiastae Qui Ab Hebraeis Appellatur Qohelet*, Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici 100 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1950); Brown, *Ecclesiastes*. For a survey of these works, see Santiago Bretón, “Qoheleth Studies,” *BTB* 3, no. 1 (1973): 22–50.

18 Ginsberg, “The Structure and Contents of the Book of Koheleth,” 138–49. Ginsberg’s recognition of the unity of the text excludes the superscription (1:1) and the epilogue (12:9–14).

19 Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 12, 18.

20 Loader explains “polar structures” as “patterns of tension created by the counterposition of two elements to one another.” J. A. Loader, *Polar Structures in the Book of Qohelet*, BZAW 152 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 1.

with the exception of A. Wright's proposal."²¹ A. Wright's analysis shows two large sections of the whole book, each of which reveals the main theme of the book; that is, the vanity of human life and an unknowable God. For A. Wright, Qohelet's final advice is to enjoy life and to fear God.²² In other words, everything is vain, and there is no way for humans to understand God's intentions; therefore, the only meaningful way of life is to enjoy one's life and to fear God. Based on his recognition of the flow of Qohelet's logic embedded in the structure of the text, A. Wright treats all other statements that do not support the basic claims either as secondary or as Qohelet's citation of a different viewpoint that he is criticizing. For example, Qohelet's promotion of the so-called golden mean in Eccl 7:16–17 (אל־תִּהְיֶה צַדִּיק הַרְבֵּה....אל תרשע הרבה) (Do not be righteous exceedingly....Do not be wicked exceedingly)²³ is not what Qohelet himself intends to promote, because the advice opposes Qohelet's insistence on the value of "the fear of God" in Eccl 5:6 and 11:9.²⁴ As shown above, the structural readings of A. Wright and Loader try to recognize the general unity of the text by subordinating one perspective to the other.

One of the strengths of the three strategies in the second mode of analysis is their insistence upon the unity of the book.²⁵ In the second category, the book is more likely treated as "book" or literary whole to be appreciated rather than as a series of largely disconnected topos that yield no real overarching thematic or literary coherence and unity. However, the unity of the text is recognized only through minimizing certain perspectives because contradiction is a quality incompatible with the modern concept of unity, the feature that marks a limitation of these modernist approaches.

3 Deconstructing the Modernist Approaches

While both modes of analysis discussed above attempt to solve the problems of the contradictions, a collective weakness of the proposed solutions emerges:

21 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 147–48.

22 A. Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx: The Structure of the Book of Qoheleth," *CBQ* 30, no. 3 (1968): 313–34. Besides the two pieces of advice, A. Wright suggests some more practical advice as Qohelet's final conclusion.

23 Most translations used in this project are from NRSV with my modifications. The rest of the translations without a note of source references, such as the passage above, are my own.

24 *Ibid.*, 334.

25 The unity the scholars in this mode of analysis recognize is often not the complete unity of the whole text because they adopt both modes of analysis at the same time, and, more often than not, the epilogue (12:9–14) is recognized as a work of an editorial hand.

they are polarized. This polarization is not in harmony with the fundamental goal of these modern approaches, insofar as the goal is to resolve the contradictions in order to provide “one true knowledge about Ecclesiastes” that can help the reader to “correctly” understand the text. As long as opinions remain polarized, this goal seems unreachable and probably inappropriate. The state of this scholarly discourse is, then, a sign that the reader of Ecclesiastes needs a new approach to overcome the limitations of those modernist approaches. However, it does not mean that a new approach should discard those modern solutions altogether. Previous scholars’ interpretations left us valuable insights about Ecclesiastes from which we can go a step further. To advance our understandings of Ecclesiastes, therefore, I will carefully assess those modern readings on a more fundamental level rather than their specific arguments, so that we can have firm hermeneutic and philosophical grounds to grasp the core problem of the modern approaches. Thus, I discuss three topics: what is contradiction; why should the removal of contradiction be such a critical element in the scholarly discourse on Ecclesiastes; and why should there be such diverse understandings of the book? In the following three sections, I will offer a brief discussion on each question.

3.1 *On Contradictions*

Since our interpretive object is contradiction, we first need to lay the foundation of its definition to further discuss why contradiction matters or why a variety of interpretations keeps arising. Simply put, contradiction is the lack of consistency. In terms of the basic definitions of consistency, Clarence Irving Lewis and Cooper Harold Langford—prominent philosophers and logicians of the twentieth century in the United States—once famously stated that “when we speak of two propositions as ‘consistent,’ we mean that it is not possible, with either one of them as premise, to deduce the falsity of the other.”²⁶ In other words, a contradiction is, as it is regularly understood, “a combination of statements, ideas, or features of a situation that are opposed to one another”; or “a person, thing, or situation in which inconsistent elements are present”; or “the statement of a position opposite to one already made.”²⁷ According to Nicholas Bunnin and Jiyuan Yu, “a contradiction conjoins a statement and its negation (‘p and not p’), ascribes and denies the ascription of the same feature to an individual (‘a is f and not f’), or, more broadly, is false on logical grounds

26 Lewis and Langford, *Symbolic Logic* (1932; repr., New York: Dover, 1951), 153.

27 New Oxford American Dictionary, 3rd ed., s.v. “contradiction.”

alone.”²⁸ For example, if Qohelet states that God manages the world in justice, and God does not manage the world in justice, there is a contradiction in Qohelet’s words.

Given the definitions of contradiction, we need to note some implications that the presence of contradiction in Ecclesiastes gives to modern Ecclesiastes scholarship before we move onto the next question. Implicit in these definitions or common understandings of contradiction is the fact that contradictions—the inconsistent or incoherent aspects of a statement, text, or situation—can be objectively identified. Such features are “out there” in a statement or a text, and an observing or hearing subject (at least a competent one) can accurately identify the contradiction. This understanding, though not necessarily incorrect, nonetheless, obscures the role of the observer or hearing/reading subject in identifying a contradiction. It presumes that at least competent observers or readers and hearers should be able to discern the inconsistencies and incoherencies that constitute a contradiction. Yet as we have seen with Ecclesiastes at least, biblical scholars (surely competent readers!) have reached no unanimity regarding either the nature and extent of Qohelet’s contradictions because some contradictions are either harmonizable or explainable for some scholars but not for all scholars. In other words, while modern scholars have been trying to offer objectively understandable solutions to the problems of the contradictions in Ecclesiastes, contradiction itself is a subject matter that cannot even be objectively identified. Such a situation signals the modernist bias of much of contemporary biblical studies and represents an impasse in Ecclesiastes studies that only a turn to a new approach can help overcome.

3.2 *Contradiction as Cognitive Disturbance*

The modernist assumption that consistency is a basic quality of an “understandable” text has been functioning as an “automatic navigation system” that suggests ways to find solutions to the problems of contradiction in Ecclesiastes discussed above. However, the assumption has confined the scholarly discourse only to limited ways; that is, either separating or harmonizing the contradictory statements. As we saw, these modern approaches, seeking to resolve contradiction, constantly have offered polarized opinions and have encountered impasse. We must then ask “why the removal of contradiction matters so much?” to deconstruct modernism’s bias, to set a new direction, and finally to advance our understandings of the contradictions in Ecclesiastes.

28 Bunnin and Yu, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 141.

According to the psychologist Jean Piaget, a western modernist thinker, the human mind constantly seeks a cognitive equilibrium out of disturbances it perceives using various strategies of regulating complex information to produce a coherent and stable order of the world.²⁹ The contradictions in Ecclesiastes are a source of cognitive disturbance because they make the meaning of the text indeterminable or unintelligible. Thus, from a Piagetian perspective, the cognitive disturbance caused by the contradictions in Ecclesiastes naturally urges the reader to establish equilibrium.

To acquire psychological equilibrium in general, science or scientific methods have been a primary tool for (at least) western subjects in their quest in the modern era.³⁰ Particularly in scholarly discourses, the language of science has taken one of the most important positions in the process of equilibration, and Ecclesiastes scholarship has also followed the *Zeitgeist*. For example, A. Wright claims that the New Criticism methodology that he employs for his study is “modern,” “scientific,” and “objective.”³¹ In Antoon Schoors’s introduction to his edited work, *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, he also describes Ecclesiastes scholarship as “scientific research.”³²

In modernism, what was pursued as the correct knowledge was logically intelligible explanations of all human experiences. This is what I would call “the stabilizing aspect” of modern approaches. Insofar as we seek logical explanations in all matters, the process of establishing our equilibrium from cognitive disturbance is possible only through finding logical explanations of the problems that caused the cognitive disturbance. This is why removing contradiction in Ecclesiastes has been such a critical element in understanding the book in the modern era. As discussed, for instance, the solutions in the first mode of analysis remove the tension generated by the contradictions in Ecclesiastes by separating conflicting topoi and glosses; this, then, is the logical explanation for the contradictions in this mode of analysis. The solutions in the second mode of analysis also provide an alternate logical explanation by subordinating one conflicting perspective to the other. In both cases, the cognitive disturbances are eliminated. In other words, Ecclesiastes scholarship

29 Piaget, *The Development of Thought: Equilibration of Cognitive Structures*, trans. Arnold Rosin (New York: Viking Press, 1977).

30 Of course, humans are capable of ignoring conflicting pieces of information for the sake of maintaining the stability of one’s existing schema that constitutes one’s knowledge, worldview, and identity, and, therefore, the process of meaning-making that generates equilibrium is not always logical.

31 A. Wright, “The Riddle of the Sphinx,” 317–18.

32 Schoors, introduction to *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. Schoors (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 1.

has been devising stabilizing systems that offer either logical explanations for the presence of the contradictions or various ways to regulate contradictory information to produce logical coherence.

An important characteristic of the stabilizing aspect of modern approaches is the epistemology of the binary oppositions. The modern impulse to seek logical explanations for complex realities often leads readers to simplify what is genuinely complex, and the epistemology of the binary opposition is regularly the tool for such a task. While the binary opposition is an important, and often necessary, epistemological strategy in the construction of meaning, it sometimes reduces complexity into simplicity. The human mind enculturated in modernism perceives the world frequently based on a dualistic perception of realities such as male/female; right/wrong; we/others; culture/savagery; and superior/inferior to name a few. One of the problems of this type of perception is that, not to mention that the perception itself is simplistic, we feel an impulse to choose only one “correct” answer between the two options. In other words, in the process of the reduction, the epistemological system of the binary opposition constructs a hierarchy where two opposite items are not treated equally. As Jacques Derrida claims, “one of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand.”³³ Therefore, based on this mode of thinking, Qohelet is always either/or but never both/and. The proposed solutions discussed above—both the unity-camp and the disunity-camp—clearly exhibit this type of reduction, and, as a result, scholars’ opinions are irreconcilably polarized. Though the binary opposition as an epistemological strategy helps us achieve a temporary equilibrium by simplifying complex realities, the equilibrium can easily be disturbed by the very fact that simplified realities are, in fact, complex.

According to Seyla Benhabib, behind the epistemology of modernism lies a belief that humans can represent the essence of an entity, but he also claims that that belief is erroneous because the so-called “essence” is ultimately a reduction of a heterogeneous entity into a homogeneous one.³⁴ The alleged “essence” cannot properly show the complexity of the material precisely because it shows only a part of it—possibly with distortions, and always simpler than realities. The heterogeneous nature of Ecclesiastes is, through the epistemology of the hierarchical binary opposition, reduced to smaller units or a coherent representation of the material by treating other aspects as secondary.

33 Derrida, *Positions*, ed. Christopher Norris, trans. Alan Bass (London: Continuum, 2004), 38–39.

34 Benhabib, “Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-François Lyotard,” in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 111.

In this manner, such approaches can be labeled as reductionism, and it does not seem legitimate to absolutize any simplified understanding of complex text like Ecclesiastes even though every modern reading of Ecclesiastes tries to present, simply, “the correct interpretation.”

3.3 *Diversified Interpretations in Modern Approaches*

Modernists, however, simultaneously question the validity of previous knowledge as a basis to build new and better knowledge because previously suggested knowledge is always imperfect. “The correct knowledge” is the ultimate goal after all, and a simplified reading essentially leaves space for newer readings. This is what I would call “the destabilizing aspect” of modernism that creates a diversity of opinion. Scholars have worked to find the correct knowledge about the contradictions in Ecclesiastes under the guide of modernism. While opinions flourished, they provided no definitely “correct” answer. Of course, each work has its own reasonable and logical points. As introduced above, Ecclesiastes can be viewed, to a certain extent, as a collection of separate units as well as an edited work, and it also seems to show a progress of thoughts, structural design, and quotations. But, the limitations of the modern approaches is to finalize the unfinalizable story of Qohelet as well as the book called Ecclesiastes by seeking the alleged “essence,” which cannot but result in reducing its complexity into only a partial representation. After all, the pieces of knowledge that modernist scholars produced are not truly correct knowledge as long as they seek the “essence” of any given matter, but rather partial, incomplete, and sometimes distorted knowledge. That is how the modern act of research is able to destabilize what someone else previously tried to stabilize, and its result is an endless discourse on a topic that never reaches its goal, one true and correct knowledge. Jean-François Lyotard argues that “consensus is a horizon that is never reached,”³⁵ and, accordingly, modern discourses are destined to be diverse. In this regard, Ecclesiastes scholarship is not an exception, and this is one of the reasons that we have such diverse opinions about the contradictions in Ecclesiastes.

35 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, *Theory and History of Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 61.

4 The Progress

Perhaps, the notion of “correct knowledge” in the modern sense became a trap for the readers of Ecclesiastes because it led us to seek the fantasy of “essence,” or clarity, and simplicity out of what is genuinely contradictory, logically unintelligible, and unfinalizable. As modernism challenges the validity of previous knowledge for the sake of truth, it has developed and ultimately arrived at the conclusion that correct knowledge rests on the realization of the complexity of reality rather than on stabilizing systems. After centuries of history of modern Ecclesiastes scholarship, we realize that the knowledge that has been produced under the paradigm of modernism is not truly correct, and the truth lies in the realization of the text’s unfinalizable complexity rather than in the logical excuses for the presence of the contradictions or in ways to explain the contradictions away. Lyotard points out that “what is outdated is not asking what is true and what is just, but viewing science as positivistic” which eventually resulted in “relegating it [science] to the status of unlegitimated learning, half-knowledge....”³⁶ For Lyotard, the system and stability that modern approaches have been seeking are outdated goals because they only produce “half-knowledge.” Lyotard notes that now the metaquestion “What is true and what is just?” has further developed “modern science” into a “postmodern science” that is capable of embracing catastrophe, instability, unintelligibility, and paradox.³⁷ It is probably unsuitable to call this study “postmodern science,” but we still need to set a new course different than that of the modern paradigm, which Lyotard calls “outdated,” in order to understand the contradictions in Ecclesiastes.³⁸

36 Ibid., 54.

37 Ibid., 53–60.

38 In 1995, Carol A. Newsom pointed out that “scholarly work on Ecclesiastes has remained, with very few exceptions, the province of traditional historical criticism,” the spirit of which is modernism. Newsom, “Job and Ecclesiastes,” in *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future: Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker*, ed. James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen, and Kent Harold Richards (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 184.

Bakhtinian Hermeneutics and Ecclesiastes

One of our new goals is to acknowledge the complexity and logical unintelligibility of the contradictions in Ecclesiastes, and this requires a new approach. However, the contradictions in Ecclesiastes are still a source of cognitive disturbance, because the modern human mind almost “naturally” seeks a status that is free of cognitive disturbance. As mentioned, under the paradigm of modernism, contradiction is a “problem,” a hindrance to interpretation, and therefore, one cannot avoid reductionism. Thus, a new approach should provide a way of reading that not only embraces the contradictions as they stand but also accomplishes a certain level of cognitive equilibrium. For this task, this study employs Bakhtin’s literary insights.

1 Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin

Bakhtin (1895–1975) was a Russian literary theorist. Though repressed under Stalin’s Soviet Union, his works were acknowledged in literary studies in the Soviet Union beginning in the 1950s. Bakhtin’s works were introduced to the English-speaking world during the 1980s, and now he is recognized as one of the most important literary critics of the twentieth century.¹ As a literary critic, Bakhtin is by far the most famous for his redefined concept, “dialogue,” through which he informs us about the polyphonic or dialogic dimension of texts, human consciousness, and the world. Indeed, it is true that Bakhtin is well-known for his various concepts and neologisms, such as dialogue, unfinalizability, and chronotope. However, another notable Bakhtin’s contribution is that he profoundly challenged the position of poetry. As Morson and Emerson argue, poetry is often considered to be a superior form of art to prose, but Bakhtin significantly challenged this norm by promoting and privileging

1 For more biographic information of Bakhtin, see Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), xv–xxxiii; Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich, *Theory and History of Literature* 13 (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 3–13; Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, xiii–xv; Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London: Routledge, 1990), 1–13.

the status of prose, the language of the “ordinary,” “everyday,” and the “novel.”² Morson and Emerson explain that prose had been disparaged as “fallen poetry” or “nonliterary form” in the past, whereas “poetics” is “a virtual synonym for ‘theory of literature,’ not just a theory of poetry.”³ Bakhtin, however, recognized that prose, especially the novel, has “a special way of conceiving events and of understanding the interrelations of space, time, social milieu, character, and action,” and it should be appreciated in its own terms.⁴ In fact, Bakhtin’s famous literary, philosophical insights are fundamentally connected to his discourse of prose. Thus, Morson and Emerson coin the term, “prosaics,” as opposed to poetics, to designate Bakhtin’s discourse on prose, prosaic language, and literary forms.

1.1 *Bakhtin and Biblical Studies*

In biblical studies, Robert Polzin first introduced Bakhtin to biblical studies, applying a Bakhtinian lens to analyze the deuteronomistic history. As represented by a few keywords, such as retribution, the centralization of worship, and the prohibition of idolatry, the deuteronomistic history seems thoroughly governed by its authorial intention or “voice.” Polzin, however, demonstrates that however it seems “monologic” in its surface level, the deuteronomistic history presents dialogic sense of truth through multiple consciousnesses.⁵ Since Polzin, a good number of scholars have applied Bakhtin to the Bible. Barbara Green, for example, wrote an introduction in which she explains key Bakhtinian concepts and illustrates how they are useful for biblical interpretation.⁶ Besides Polzin and Green, Carol Newsom’s works represent perhaps one of the most sophisticated use of Bakhtin in biblical studies. For example, Newsom utilizes Bakhtin’s notion of genre in her work on *The Book of Job*.⁷

2 Morson and Emerson understand “novel” as a form of art that utilizes everyday language. See Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 15–36.

3 Ibid., 15–19.

4 Ibid., 19.

5 Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980).

6 Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction*, SBLSS (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000); Green, *How Are the Mighty Fallen?: A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003); Green, “Experiential Learning: The Construction of Jonathan in the Narrative of Saul and David,” in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Roland Boer, SemeiaSt 63 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007): 43–62.

7 Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) Some of her other works, which are related to Bakhtin, include Newsom, “Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth”, *JR* 76, no. 2 (1996): 290–306; Newsom, *The*

Taking the final form of the book as a whole, Newsom recognizes six different genres, each of which represents its own world and ideology, that are in conversation with each other. Newsom, therefore, advocates the dialogic truth of the book of Job and its unfinalizability.⁸ Moreover, in 2014, Mary Mills, in fact, already employed Bakhtin's literary insights to analyze Ecclesiastes (and Jonah) in her article. Designating Qohelet's contradictions as "Qoheletic conversation," Mills identifies multiple voices in Qohelet's speeches, such as the royal persona and the reflective observer, and argues that Ecclesiastes utilizes polyphony as a "literary vehicle for addressing paradoxical experiences."⁹ Now, biblical scholars continue to use Bakhtin, as is clear from the SBL section "Bakhtin and the Biblical Imagination."¹⁰

2 Dialogue

What Bakhtin provided as a literary critic were no critical theories or methods of interpretation but philosophical reflections on human life. In fact, Bakhtin was immensely hostile to any sort of systemization, generalization, reification, materialization, and anything that homogenizes, controls, or orders the phenomenon of human life. Rather, he was obsessed with the unsystematizable complexity of the world, human life, and individual subjectivity—their potentials, voices, peculiarities, creativity, and freedom. Bakhtin's consistent

Self As Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran, STDJ Volume 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Newsom, "Spying Out the Land: A Report From Genology," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Roland Boer, Semeia Studies 63 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007): 19–30.

- 8 Seong Whan Timothy Hyun also offers another Bakhtinian reading of the book of Job. In Hyun's work, unlike Newsom who examines the dialogue of the genre-voices in the book, he focuses on the unfinalizable character Job. Hyun demonstrates how various voices, including Job himself, try to define the identity of Job in the course of the narrative but eventually fail. Thus, he argues that Job is unfinalizable. Hyun also argues that Job's unfinalizable identity invites the reader to discover and re-discover the book's meanings; therefore the reader's dialogue with the book is unfinalizable as well. See Seong Whan Timothy Hyun, *Job the Unfinalizable: A Bakhtinian Reading of Job 1–11*, BibInt 124 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
- 9 Mills, "Polyphonic Narration in Ecclesiastes and Jonah," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes, LHBOTS (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 71–83.
- 10 In Roland Boer's edited volume, fourteen scholars, including Newsom, Green, and Boer himself as an editor, are engaged in a scholarly conversation about Bakhtinian readings of the Bible. See Boer, ed., *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, SemeiaSt 63 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

philosophical reflections on these issues eventually bore fruit in the form of his concepts of dialogue, unfinalizability, and an innovative view of genre—three concepts important for this project.

The first to be discussed is dialogue, which Bakhtin scholars explain in various ways. Dialogue may seem not appropriate to study Ecclesiastes since the speeches in the text largely take the form of Qohelet's monologue. Yet, Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue include a special category, "dialogized interior monologue," which explains how a monologue in form can be dialogic in the speaker's mind. This special type of dialogue establishes a clear starting point for a further analysis of some key contradictions in Ecclesiastes.

2.1 *The First Sense: Every Utterance is Dialogic*

According to Morson and Emerson, Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue have three basic senses. In terms of the first sense, Morson and Emerson note that, for Bakhtin, "every utterance is by definition dialogic."¹¹ Bakhtin's dialogue in this first sense is in fact not so much dialogue per se, but rather explains the nature of the utterance. For Bakhtin, the utterance is not an objectified unit in a linguistic system but a unit of speech communication in spoken or written forms taking place in an unrepeatable context of time and space, and every utterance is dialogically related to other utterances.¹² Bakhtin puts it as follows:

A given speaker is not the first to speak about it [a topic]. The object, as it were, has already been articulated, disputed, elucidated, and evaluated in various ways. Various viewpoints, world views, and trends cross, converge, and diverge in it. The speaker is not the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects, giving them names for the first time.

The speaker is not Adam, and therefore the subject of his [*sic*] speech itself inevitably becomes the arena where his [*sic*] opinions meet those of his [*sic*] partners ... or other viewpoints, world views, trends, theories, and so forth.¹³

For Bakhtin, the legendary first human Adam was the only one who might have experienced non-dialogic utterances, but as of the moment of the first

11 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 131.

12 For more information, see Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, trans. Vern W. McGee, University of Texas Press Slavic Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 60–131.

13 Ibid., 93–94.

utterance, all other utterances have risen in response to the “already spoken about,” as Morson and Emerson put it.¹⁴ An utterance emerges out of a complex web of human discourses and dives back into it as it responds and is, in turn, responded to.

2.2 *The Second Sense: Dialogue as Double-Voiced Discourse*

If Bakhtin’s dialogue in the first sense is a broader reflection on the nature of utterance, dialogue in the second sense indicates a specific type of “discourse;”¹⁵ that is, dialogic discourse that can be contrasted with monologic discourse. Bakhtin tries to distinguish “dialogic” discourses from more or less “monologic” ones. It may seem contradictory, since, as we just saw, Bakhtin argues that “every” utterance is dialogic. Therefore every discourse should be dialogic as well. But, in fact, he also claims that there is monologic discourse.¹⁶ For Bakhtin, a discourse can be monologic if it is single-voiced without directly engaging with any other utterances.¹⁷ In other words, single-voiced discourses try to deliver only authorial semantic intentions without a direct reference to others’ utterances. Dialogic discourses are composed of multiple voices, and the voices are dialogically related producing multiple semantic intentions. Morson and Emerson offer a simple explanation that somewhat simplistically clarify how to distinguish double-voiced from single-voiced discourses: while double-voiced discourse includes quotations, single-voiced discourse does not.¹⁸ In other words, in double-voiced discourse, the author incorporates someone else’s semantic intentions into his or her own discourse, but in single-voiced discourse, the author takes on full semantic authority.

Bakhtin calls single-voiced discourse “direct and unmediated object-oriented discourse” because the main tasks of single-voiced discourses are “naming, informing, expressing, and representing” objects.¹⁹ In this type of discourse, the author has the ultimate semantic authority, and the main

14 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 137.

15 The term discourse is too slippery a word to give a clear definition. In this section, I use the term only to explain Bakhtin’s second sense of dialogue. Bakhtin’s concept here is related to the forms or contexts of utterances: monologue and dialogue. Bakhtin’s monologic discourse is monologic in its form but discursive in terms of its dialogic nature. Thus, “monologic discourse” can be understood simply as “monologic utterance.”

16 Ibid., 93.

17 Nevertheless, for Bakhtin, monologic discourses are ultimately dialogic because they are essentially, though indirectly, dialogically related to larger discourses. As mentioned, “the speaker is not the biblical Adam.” See n. 13 above.

18 Ibid., 146.

19 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson, *Theory and History of Literature* 8 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 186.

performer is usually the author. While the author often represents the main voice in this type of discourse, the author can also create a character who performs this type of discourse on behalf of the author. In this case, Bakhtin labels it "objectified discourse" because the character is "treated as an object of authorial understanding," and is always subordinated to the author's semantic intention.²⁰ Both are ultimately the author's monologue because the speech is performed in a monologic context where the author exerts ultimate semantic authority without others' dialogically related semantic intensions. In sum, single-voiced discourse is monologic according to the second sense of Bakhtin's dialogue.

To be dialogic in the second sense of Bakhtin's dialogue, discourse should be double-voiced. Bakhtin explains that, in double-voiced discourses, the author borrows someone else's speeches to "work with" or to "utilize": this type of discourse is, according to Morson and Emerson, "utterances with quotations."²¹ This type of discourse is more complex than single-voiced discourse because opinions other than author's are involved with the author's utterances. According to Bakhtin, there can be two different levels of dialogicality in double-voiced discourse. There are "passive," and "active" double-voiced discourses. On the one hand, passive double-voiced discourse is controlled by the author as in single-voiced discourse, but it is called double-voiced because of its use of others' discourses. As Bakhtin puts it, "the other person's discourse is a completely passive tool in the hands of the author wielding it. He [*sic*] takes, so to speak, someone else's meek and defenseless discourse and installs his [*sic*] own interpretation in it, forcing it to serve his [*sic*] own new purposes."²² Thus, Morson and Emerson note that "the author or speaker is in control" in passive double-voiced discourse.²³ Michael Holquist comments on the concept of the passive double-voiced discourse as follows:

Such double-voicing, remaining within the boundaries of a single hermetic and unitary language system, without any underlying fundamental socio-linguistic orchestration, may be only a stylistically secondary accompaniment to the dialogue and forms of polemic. The internal bifurcation (double-voicing) of discourse, sufficient to a single and unitary

20 Ibid., 186–87.

21 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 189–90; Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 146.

22 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 197. Non-inclusive language in quotations, such as "man", "he," and "his," may appear elsewhere, but I do not call attention to those occurrences after this occurrence.

23 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 150.

language and to a consistently monologic style, can never be a fundamental form of discourse: it is merely a game, a tempest in a teapot.²⁴

On the other hand, in active double-voiced discourse, as Morson and Emerson state, “the word of the other does not submit so easily.”²⁵ Bakhtin notes that “the other’s words actively influence the author’s speech, forcing it to alter itself accordingly under their influence and initiative.”²⁶ In reality, no utterance can be genuinely monologic, but in the world of literature, monologue is possible. Thus, if Bakhtin’s dialogue in the first sense (and the third sense, which will be discussed in the following paragraph) addresses the nature of reality, or our deeply dialogical lives and relationships, dialogue in the second sense would attend to the world of literature, which can be either monologic or dialogic.

2.3 *The Third Sense: Shaping Consciousness through Dialogue*

Bakhtin’s dialogue in the third sense, based on the analysis of Morson and Emerson, is “a model of the world” as well as “a view of truth and the world.”²⁷ To explain the nature of human consciousness and life, Bakhtin uses the term “dialogue.” Our conversations and relationships never stop being an essential part of living, and they continually flow into unexpected and unpredictable directions. That is, human life is not a monologue controlled by each individual, but rather is a process of constant striving for survival and wellbeing through unpredictable dialogic relationships with one another. Human life is filled with dialogic speeches, and, therefore, dialogue is an essential element and a major part of human life. Thus, Bakhtin argues as follows:

The very being of man (both external and internal) is the deepest communion. *To be means to communicate.* Absolute death (non-being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered.... To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself.

24 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 325.

25 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 150.

26 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 197. It should also be noted that Bakhtin acknowledges that certain passive double-voiced discourses can also have the potential to become active double-voiced discourses when the level of objectification of the other voice is decreased. See *Ibid.* 190.

27 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 49, 131.

Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue.... He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium.²⁸

What is notable in these statements is that our consciousnesses and lives, according to Bakhtin, are dialogic in the sense of “active double-voiced discourse.” To be more precise, it is “multi-voiced discourse.” The consciousnesses of “others” are not simply subordinate to “my” consciousness but are consciousnesses that engage in dialogues with each other’s thoughts and perceptions. Those consciousnesses, while independent, mutually affect each other’s lives in the constructions of their own consciousnesses. Our consciousnesses and lives are shaped through dialogue. On the construction of self-consciousness, Bakhtin explains as follows:

The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness.

(...) A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another*.²⁹

Bakhtin’s understanding of the dialogic process of consciousness-construction can offer an important insight about the contradictory consciousnesses embedded in Qohelet’s utterances. Though monologic in form, the contradictions in Ecclesiastes show us that the compositional feature of the book is “active double-voiced discourse,” shaped by multiple voices of others.

2.4 *Ecclesiastes and Dialogized Interior Monologue*

A further, more specialized, and more complex category of Bakhtin’s concept of dialogue, which is most closely related to Qohelet’s contradictions, is “dialogized interior monologue,” also designated as “interior dialogue” and “microdialogue.”³⁰ It is an active double-voiced discourse in the *form* of monologue. Bakhtin explains that while dialogized interior monologue is a monologue in its *compositional form*, it fully incorporates voices of multiple characters, or two or more unmerged consciousnesses, without subordinating them to the protagonist’s own, despite their contradictory positions to him—

28 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 287, 293, (Here and in all subsequent citations, italics in the original unless otherwise noted).

29 Ibid., 287.

30 Ibid., 72–75.

or herself.³¹ As Bakhtin puts it, this is a conversation of the protagonist with “his own double, with the devil, with his alter ego, with his own caricature.”³² For Bakhtin, if a text provides unmerged multiple consciousnesses that are not controlled by an authorial semantic intention, the text is dialogic regardless of its formal features. If a monologue, like Qohelet’s utterances, exhibits multiple consciousnesses that cannot be merged or subordinated to the authorial voice, it is truly dialogic. On the contrary, a conversation in literature that clearly delivers the authorial voice as a primary message of the text is monologic in a Bakhtinian sense even if it is composed in a dialogue form, because the author subordinates all other voices to the authorial voice and tries to control the meaning of the text. Qohelet’s contradictions show us multiple consciousnesses that cannot be reduced into a coherent whole or cannot be controlled by authorial semantic intention. Therefore, Qohelet’s utterances are dialogic even though his utterances are not in a dialogue form.

A dialogized interior monologue is, like all other forms of utterances, not an isolated independent speech but a “rejoinder”³³ to existing speeches. According to Bakhtin, Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novels are, in general, truly dialogic because Dostoevsky’s novels are composed of “a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world.”³⁴ In particular, a monologue of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* can be taken as an example of a dialogized interior monologue. Raskolnikov’s dialogized interior monologue, which Dostoevsky presents at some length, begins right after he receives a letter from his mother informing him that she (Pulcheria) decided to let his sister (Dounia) marry a rich man called Luzhin for the sake of a better financial situation for the entire family, which is currently suffering from poverty. The following is a part of Raskolnikov’s dialogized interior monologue:

It’s clear that Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov is the central figure in the business [an arranged marriage], and no one else. Oh yes, she can ensure his happiness, keep him in the university ... make his whole future secure; perhaps he may even be a rich man later on.... But my mother? It’s all Rodya [Raskolnikov’s nickname], precious Rodya, her firstborn! For such a son who would not sacrifice such a daughter!.... I won’t have your sacrifice, Dounia, I won’t have it, mother! It shall not be, so long as I am alive, it shall not, it shall not! I won’t accept it!

³¹ Ibid., 73–74.

³² Ibid., 28.

³³ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 279.

³⁴ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 6.

He suddenly paused in his reflections and stood still.

It shall not be? But what are you going to do to prevent it? You'll forbid it? And what right have you? What can you promise them on your side to give you such a right?

Now something must be done, now do you understand that?³⁵

In literature, according to Bakhtin, what makes a monologue in form dialogic in nature is the protagonist's "dialogic contact" with other voices or consciousnesses.³⁶ Though Raskolnikov receives only a simple letter, it is sufficient to provoke the multiple consciousnesses that Raskolnikov came into contact with in the past, and they enter into the dialogue "with their own truths, with their own positions in life."³⁷ As Raskolnikov is placed in a predicament, he starts expressing contradictions: he cannot stand the decision, but he cannot disagree either. As Bakhtin puts it, "Raskolnikov becomes a field of battle of multiple consciousnesses or voices."³⁸

The letter first provokes, as Bakhtin points out, Dounia's voice, which is mourning over her own sacrifice for her brother: "It's clear that Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov is the central figure in the business, and no one else. Oh yes, she can ensure his happiness." As he fully empathizes his sister Dounia's consciousness, Raskolnikov utters these words as if Dounia is speaking about this absurd arranged marriage that will benefit her brother by the sacrifice of herself. Then, the mother's voice appears simultaneously with Dounia's voice: "It's all Rodya, precious Rodya, her firstborn! For such a son who would not sacrifice such a daughter!" This nickname Rodya is what the mother calls Raskolnikov. Of course, we also hear Raskolnikov's own voice: "I won't have your sacrifice, Dounia, I won't have it, mother!" These voices are clearly independent voices in Raskolnikov's dialogized interior monologue, but an important feature of this type of monologue that Bakhtin reveals is the fact that "all words in it are double-voiced."³⁹ For example, as Bakhtin explains, "Raskolnikov actually re-creates Dounia's words with her evaluating and persuading intonations, and over her intonations he layers his own—ironic, indignant, precautionary; that is, in these words two voices are sounding simultaneously—Raskolnikov's and Dounia's."⁴⁰ Likewise, in the words

35 Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Constance Garnett, The Harvard Classics Shelf of Fiction (New York: P. F. Collier, 1917), 43–44.

36 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 73–75.

37 Ibid., 74.

38 Ibid., 86.

39 Ibid., 74.

40 Ibid., 75.

of the mother's voice that carry the mother's "love and tenderness," Bakhtin notices that "there is Raskolnikov's voice with its intonations of bitter irony, indignation ... and sorrowful reciprocal love."⁴¹

According to Bakhtin, the whole letter, which I did not fully cite here, in fact, provokes voices of many others as well. Thus Bakhtin points out that it is not just a moderate dispute between him and his mother, but a battle of multiple consciousnesses that Raskolnikov experienced and subsequently internalized, such as those of Sonya (the lover of Raskolnikov, a figure who was forced into prostitution and who would agree with Dounia), Svidrigailov (a child molester and Raskolnikov's parodic double who would be willing to make a sacrifice of any young girl like Dounia for himself), and others.⁴² In the same manner, it can be assumed that, as provoked by certain events, though not revealed in the text itself, multiple consciousnesses or voices that Qohelet came into contact with enter into a dialogue with each other in Qohelet's wisdom discourse.

2.4.1 The Dialogic Dimension of Qohelet's Monologue

Though monologic in their compositional form, Qohelet's speeches show the characteristic of dialogue through their contradictions. This study is, in fact, not the first attempt to read the text as dialogue. In other words, this study partakes in an existing discussion that reveals the book's dialogic aspects. Even though the modernist solutions to the contradictions in Ecclesiastes do not deliberately illuminate the book's dialogic aspects in a Bakhtinian sense, those solutions inadvertently reveal such aspects. For example, the solution that takes the contradictions as a result of multiple editorial hands indicates that there are at least two independent consciousnesses; other solutions, such as Theodore Anthony Perry's reading of dialogue between two characters and especially Gordis's quotation hypothesis, likewise acknowledge multiples voices in the book even though they eventually monologize Qohelet, as well as the book as a whole, by subordinating certain voices to a subjectively determined main voice.

The works of several contemporary scholars, however, ultimately gesture more fully toward the dialogic aspects of Qohelet despite their typical strategies to monologize Qohelet's contradictions discussed above. Fox, for instance, captures an important aspect of Qohelet that resonates with Bakhtin's notion of dialogized interior monologue. Although his work does not explicitly describe Ecclesiastes as reflecting Qohelet's interior dialogue, it is suggestive of the internal dialogic dimension of Qohelet and the manner

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 73–89.

in which various dialogic voices engage in dialogue in Qohelet's consciousness. In particular, for Fox, Qohelet's contradictions are a way of expressing the conflicts between his observations and his religious expectations—the conflict between an absurd and disorderly world and God's justice.⁴³ In other words, the world as perceived in Qohelet's mind and the religious expectations of Qohelet are dialogically engaged, conflicted, and expressed contradictorily. Fox's aim is no longer to remove the tension in the contradictions to make the text coherent. Fox rather takes the contradictions as a literary art, “real” and “intended.”⁴⁴ However, despite his insights, Fox's approach—concerned as it is with the intentions of the character Qohelet and the author of Ecclesiastes—nonetheless remains monologic. Indeed Fox rejects the types of reading that take the contradictions as dialogues because Ecclesiastes is a monologue in form and hence offers no real dialogue. Fox's strategy to avoid dialogic approaches despite the contradictory perspectives in Ecclesiastes is to attribute the contradictions to the real world that Qohelet experienced rather than to Qohelet himself. Fox claims that “to be precise, Qohelet is not so much contradicting himself as *observing* contradictions in the world.”⁴⁵ Fox goes on to argue that Qohelet “only describes them, bemoans them, and suggests how to live in such a refractory world.”⁴⁶ Though Fox takes the contradictions as they stand without disassembling the text into topical units, editorial processes, or a series of quotations, a lingering modern trait that is still present in his reading is the rejection of the notion that Qohelet contradicts himself or that he thereby presents an incoherent text. Modernist assumptions about unity continue to predominate.

Nevertheless, what can be inferred from Fox's reading, which takes the contradictions as “real” and “intended,” is that there is, at least internally, a dialogic dimension to the contradictions. Thus, Fox claims that “we want to know what Qohelet *really* believes. But Qohelet goes no further. He is at a dead end. *He* is frustrated.”⁴⁷ What is notable in Fox's reading is that he finds a “frustrated” Qohelet. Though Fox does not explicitly describe Qohelet's contradictions as “interior dialogue,” what is implied in his reading is that Qohelet's inner struggles can also be understood as an interior dialogue. It can be said that Fox's basic approach to the contradictions provides an important insight for this

43 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 51.

44 Ibid., 3.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., 70.

study, but, as will be demonstrated in later chapters, I develop the idea that the contradictions are “real” and “intended” in a significantly different direction.

Perry’s work offers another sort of advance beyond the main approaches sketched above. He explicitly takes the text of Ecclesiastes to be reflecting a dialogue between two voices. In *Dialogues with Kohelet*,⁴⁸ Perry describes the contradictions as a “battlefield” between the two characters: K (Kohelet, a man of experience) and P (Presenter, a man of faith), and concludes that “sympathetic coexistence and sharing” is, in fact, one of the fundamental features of Ecclesiastes and the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁹ Perry, taking the text as a whole, reuses the eighteenth- and the nineteenth-century models of understanding that treat Ecclesiastes as a dialogue between a “calm teacher” or “warning teacher” and “exhausted/passionate inquirer” or “hasty youth,” as mentioned above. Yet Perry carries this forward more robustly and in an opposite direction.⁵⁰ In fact, Gordis already reversed the older approach, before Perry does, to argue that Qohelet was a skeptical thinker who quotes various extant sayings for his own purposes. Perry’s solution to the contradictions is similar to Gordis’s view, but there is a fundamental difference. While Gordis strives to make the message of Qohelet coherent despite the contradictions, Perry (like Fox) does not remove the contradictions. For Perry, the contradictions in Ecclesiastes constitute a battlefield-like debate that should not be harmonized. Within the *formal* monologue of Ecclesiastes, Perry recognizes two distinct, unmerged characters, or voices/consciousnesses.⁵¹ This is similar to—but in important ways different from—earlier efforts to understand the book’s contradictions in that neither the voice of K nor that of P represents the ultimate message of the book, and, although they are locked in a battle-like debate, the voices co-exist. This is an advance in the sense that Perry does not ultimately eliminate the tension caused by the book’s contradictions. Yet, like Fox’s work, Perry’s reading too remains in the modern epistemological habit that dichotomizes the consciousnesses K and P and does not recognize a fuller range of voices in Ecclesiastes. Moreover, the voices of K and P in Perry’s analysis are, in fact, not in dialogue in Bakhtin’s sense but only in dialectic relationship. The concept of dialectic will be discussed more precisely later, but what needs to be noted

48 Perry, *Dialogues with Kohelet: The Book of Ecclesiastes: Translation and Commentary* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

49 Ibid., 1–48.

50 Ginsburg, *Cohleth*, 184–85.

51 As alluded, Fox does not accept Perry’s suggestions highlighting the monologue form of the book, which cannot be understood as “dialogue” between different characters such as K and P. See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 22–24. See also Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, BLS (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1989), 27.

here is that Perry rather monologizes each of the voices so that they are unable to engage in a real dialogue, but merely remain statically and dialectically juxtaposed with one another. Perry's interpretation of the passage in Eccl 4:5–6 provides a clear example of a dialectic juxtaposition. In order to show the way that Perry portrays the "dialogue" in this passage, the following citation tries to preserve all the original look of Perry's presentation of the dialogue.

*"The fool folds his arms
and eats away at his own flesh."
"Better one handful with repose
than two fistfuls with effort
and chasing after wind." (4:5–6)⁵²*

Throughout his translation (or interpretation), Perry presents K's words in bold typeface and P's in italics, and he actually makes most sentences look like a real dialogue than mere juxtaposition of contradictory sentences shown above. The example above is one of the passages that Perry could not fully make look like a dialogue, but it precisely shows the foundation of Perry's actual project: contrasting opposing ideas; that is, K versus P. In fact, Perry himself acknowledges that the concept of dialogue that he draws on for his reading is comparable with "the modern dialectic of faith versus reasoned experience" though perhaps such comparison might be "anachronistic," as Perry himself admits.⁵³ Therefore, Perry does not recognize the manner in which Qohelet dialogic contact with multiple voices construct Qohelet's contradictory consciousness. Consequently, Perry also does not note that the voices engage in dialogue with one another in Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue.

2.4.2 Suggesting a New Direction with the Help of Bakhtin

Though Fox rejects Perry's reading because of Perry's division of characters, there is a notable commonality between the two. That is, both Fox and Perry attempt to understand the contradictions in Ecclesiastes as they stand rather than strive to remove them. Their readings do not subordinate one perspective to another for the sake of coherence but leave the tension alive. Fox understands the contradiction as Qohelet's expression of the conflicts between his religious expectation and actual experiences. Similarly, Perry distinguishes the character K from character P based on the discrepancy between experience (K) and faith (P). Both Perry's "debate" and Fox's "conflicts" imply that

⁵² Perry, *Dialogues with Kohelet*, 96.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 35.

the contradictions have a dialogical characteristic, though they differ in details. Though Fox argues that Perry's division of characters is without a textual warrant, Fox's view that the contradictions represent Qohelet's struggles in his dealing with his religious belief on the one hand and his real-world experiences on the other actually shares Perry's insight about the contradictions as a dialogue of distinct voices.

In this study, I also treat contradictions as the book's purposeful rhetoric that characterizes Qohelet's contradictory consciousness. And more importantly, I assume that one perspective in Qohelet's contradictions is not secondary or subordinate to another perspective. Rather, Qohelet's contradictions are the collision of unmerged multiple consciousnesses that emerge from their own worlds. In this regard, Qohelet's contradictions can be recognized as his dialogized interior monologue in Bakhtin's term. According to Fox and Perry, the contradictions come from the discrepancy between Qohelet's religion and the realities of the world in which he lived. In my judgment, however, this dualistic view only partially explains the contradictions because religious beliefs and worldly realities are complex and diverse spheres. They cannot be reduced to homogeneous entities that easily stand against each other. Thus, in this study, using Bakhtin's concept of dialogized interior monologue, I examine Qohelet's contradictions by exploring a fuller range of dialogic contacts that the text plausibly suggests Qohelet would have encountered (and indeed which previous scholarship has also sought to explain in terms of "background" or "influence" on Qohelet's thought).

3 Unfinalizability

Bakhtin's concept of "unfinalizability" describes a quality of an entity that refuses to be monologized, that is, systematized, stabilized, fixed or concluded. To explain the concept of unfinalizability, I will first deal with Bakhtin's understanding of monologization. For Bakhtin, two prominent examples of the monologization of reality are dialectic and ethics. Bakhtin claims that dialectic is to "take a dialogue and remove the voices,... remove the intonations,... carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness."⁵⁴ For example, according

54 Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 147. Morson and Emerson quote this statement to explain "monologization" rather than dialectic, and this indicates how closely the two words are related. See Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 57.

to Morson and Emerson, Bakhtin would criticize Marxism for its dialectic.⁵⁵ Marxism as a historical model analyzed the progress of human history, systematized it, and drew conclusions about its destiny, which resulted in overlooking the real qualities of history, such as freedom, creativity, and the potential for the unforeseen; that is, it overlooked human history's ultimate unfinalizability. Morson and Emerson also illustrate Bakhtinian unfinalizability by referring to ethics. They ask if ethics can be systematically finalized and answer that Bakhtin would argue that the recognition of patterns, the establishment of norms, and the setting of rules cannot lock human ethics into a system.⁵⁶ In other words, no ethical rule can mechanically be applied to certain events in life because every event is conditioned by "irreversible and particular" actions of participants.⁵⁷ For Bakhtin, a monologic view of ethics fails to recognize the unfinalizability of dialogically constructed human life experiences. Bakhtin believed that life is an open-ended dialogue that cannot be dictated by a system.

Besides dialectic and ethics, for Bakhtin, another prominent example of an unfinalizable entity is human identity. Raskolnikov's dialogized interior monologue mentioned above aptly demonstrates this point. Raskolnikov fully incorporates others' consciousnesses and interacts with them agreeing and disagreeing at the same time. Unfinalizability is a result of this complex dialogic process—the interaction of unmerged multiple consciousnesses. In Bakhtin's terms, a dialogue is capable of yielding something unexpected; that is, it has "the potential for the unforeseen."⁵⁸ The reader can neither fix Raskolnikov's identity nor predict where his other thoughts will flow. As Morson and Emerson put it, using Ilya Prigogine's expression, human identity as a personal history is not "being" but "becoming" without a fixed final destiny.⁵⁹ In this respect, behind the character Raskolnikov lie freedom, creativity, and the potential for the unforeseen, which Bakhtin calls unfinalizability.

Bakhtin, as I suggested, contrasts unfinalizability with monologization.⁶⁰ For Bakhtin, as Morson and Emerson put it, monologization is a "deadening process," because "activity is represented by stasis, heterochrony is reduced to singularity, irreversibility is perceived as reversibility, openness is

55 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 44.

56 Ibid., 53.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., 46.

59 Ibid., 47.

60 Bakhtin also uses "transcription" and "finalization" to explain unfinalizability by contrasting them with unfinalizability. See Ibid., 56.

reduced to a closed systematicity, and potentials are completely overlooked.”⁶¹ Monologization is a trait of the stabilizing aspect of modernism discussed above, because it reifies, theorizes, and systematizes realities by reducing the complexities, contradictions, and particularities into regularity, clarity, and simplicity. From a Bakhtinian perspective, monologization is an illegitimate finalization of the unfinalizable.

3.1 *Ecclesiastes and Unfinalizability*

From a Bakhtinian reader's perspective, the contradictions in Ecclesiastes can be understood as interactions of the unmerged multiple consciousnesses. Because the multiple consciousnesses are realized in a single literary character, Qohelet appears to be a person whose identity, like Raskolnikov's, cannot clearly be grasped or finalized. Qohelet is unpredictable; he possesses something unexpected; he has the potential for the unforeseen. In this respect, there is a scholar whose work offers another important hermeneutic context for this study in addition to Fox and Perry: Jennifer L. Koosed.

Using various postmodern theories, Koosed reads Ecclesiastes as a “body” that the reader constantly reencounters with different impressions and meanings. She asks, “who is Qohelet?” For Koosed, we “pick up Qohelet's body every time we pick up the text, we read the body, turn its pages, touch its body with our own.”⁶² In other words, she uses a body metaphor (or personifies the text itself) and encounters Qohelet as if she is dealing with a real person whose complex identities cannot really be defined. Koosed argues that what should be noted is that the body of Qohelet represents “multiple identities, contradictory ideas, and fragmented theologies/ideologies,” not the precise and clear meaning of the text.⁶³

What is significant in her postmodern reading is her challenge to modernism's tendency to finalize truth and to advocate the singularity of truth. Her reading, in fact, recalls Bakhtin's “dialogic sense of truth,” which promotes the open-endedness, something unexpected, and, therefore, the plurality of truth.⁶⁴ For Bakhtin, truth in literature is dialogically formed and, therefore, never stops growing as it survives different times and spaces through distant future readers' interaction with it. The world that a distant future reader brings

61 Ibid. Bakhtin uses “heterochrony” to indicate “many different kinds of time,” such as “natural cycles,” “the growth of trees,” “the age of people,” “historical time,” etc. See Ibid., 416.

62 Koosed, *(Per)mutations of Qohelet: Reading the Body in the Book* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 2.

63 Ibid., 123.

64 For more information about Bakhtin's dialogic sense of truth, see Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 59–62, 234–37.

to an old text (and its old world) is what Bakhtin characterizes as “outsideness,” which “surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness” of meanings that can be generated by its original readers.⁶⁵ For Koosed, the plurality of truth in literature also emerges out of a dialogue between the text and the reader, and her conclusion clearly reveals the plurality of truth in her reading of Ecclesiastes.

So Qohelet stands before its reader.... Qohelet has wandered through time and history, proliferating endlessly, changing and mutating. Who are these Qohelets? They are alterations, transmutations, transmogrifications, modifications, reformations, revisions, variations, deviations, aberrations.... In other words, they are all, and as readers we are all, permutations of Qohelet.⁶⁶

In this statement, Koosed tries to promote the plurality of truth as it arises in the process of reading a text in general and Ecclesiastes in particular. While postmodern approaches are not new to biblical scholarship, Ecclesiastes has long been a text unexplored by postmodern perspectives. Thus, Koosed's reading contributes to an important new mode of study of Ecclesiastes that has not much been discussed previously.

The Bakhtinian reading of Qohelet's contradictions in this study shares commonalities with Koosed's reading, but not without differences. As her conclusion indicates, Koosed reveals her postmodern hermeneutic stance that gives much freedom to the reader in the dialogue with the text in order to make the text meaningful to the reader. As she writes, the text's “authorial, spatial, and temporal origins are hidden in the past.”⁶⁷ In other words, it is her contention that if the reader wants to know the so-called original Qohelet, he is essentially unknowable. For Koosed, the text is only a “skeleton,” and Qohelet is “fleshed out ... by the imagination of the reader.”⁶⁸ Therefore, as Koosed states at the outset of her work, “what follows is one more deviation, aberration, alteration, modification, variation, innovation, transformation, transmogrification, transubstantiation, transmutation, permutation, mutation [of Qohelet]....”⁶⁹ Koosed's approach thus intentionally “modernizes” the text not in a sense that is against her postmodern hermeneutic stance but in a sense that she confines the text's potential meanings within the reader's

65 Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 7.

66 Koosed, *(Per)mutations of Qohelet*, 123.

67 Ibid., 33.

68 Ibid., 32.

69 Ibid., 15.

contemporary world. From a Bakhtinian perspective, however, Koosed's reading is not "modernization and distortion" but a discovery of meanings that can only be discovered in a particular cultural context different from the text's original culture as well as all coming future epochs.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Koosed's reading pays much more attention to the reader than to the context of the book, and unleashes those potentials of the book that can only be cultivated in our particular cultural milieu.

For Bakhtin, however, promoting the reader's role is not the only way to uncover the potentials of the book. A further way that Bakhtin suggests is to find a balance between the context of the original and that of the reader.⁷¹ As Morson and Emerson explain, a reading that maximizes the advantage of a reader's outsideness is to be "enriched by something truly in the work" while "exploring the potentials of the work in a way not available to its original author and readers."⁷² The works that adopt postmodern approaches in biblical scholarship, like Koosed's work, are often founded on doubt about the knowability of the original historical context of biblical texts or finding a text's original meanings. As a result, postmodernists often unintentionally disregard the potential creativity that can only be provoked by the reader's profound engagement in the text's historical context. Bakhtin believed that the reader could find something genuinely in the text. Although I acknowledge that we cannot reconstruct the original historical context of Ecclesiastes or find original meanings, the creativity in a historical exploration of the text is as valid as any creative postmodern reading that promotes the reader's imagination. If the reader intends to provide an imaginative and creative reading instead of historically accurate correct answers about the text, Bakhtin's emphasis on finding a balance between the text and the reader can still be an important postmodern reading strategy because of its potential creativity that the reader can offer by engaging in the text's historical context.

A "postmodern" Bakhtinian approach to interpretation, like the one I offer for Qohelet's contradictions in the chapters that follow, is differentiated from general postmodern approaches as well as modern approaches. Of course, as a postmodern reader, I value the plurality of truth and suspect singularity. Unlike modern approaches, my Bakhtinian reading of Qohelet's contradictions emphasizes a reader's recognition of the complexity of meaning and rejection of

70 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 425–29. Cf. Koosed, *(Per)mutations of Qohelet*, 1–6.

71 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 429.

72 Ibid. It is not my intention to regard Koosed's approach as inferior to Bakhtinian reading. As a Bakhtinian reader of Ecclesiastes, I try to differentiate this study from Koosed's postmodern approach.

simplification. In other words, I acknowledge the contradictions as they stand and resist reductionist's clarification. Moreover, by accepting open-endedness and unfinalizability and not tolerating finalization, I offer a reading that releases Qohelet from fixed characterizations and recognizes Qohelet's freedom in his process of "becoming." Unlike many postmodern approaches, however, I explore Qohelet's historical dialogic contacts to creatively imagine how his contradictions arise and what implications those contradictions have.

4 Genre

The final key concept that informs my analysis of Qohelet's contradictions is Bakhtin's understanding of genre. Although, as in biblical form criticism, Bakhtin is deeply concerned with the social aspects of speech and literary forms, his discussion of genre moves considerably beyond form criticism's focus on the development of a particular literary form and its use in a particular *Sitz im Leben* (e.g. the Psalms in the cult) and a form's oral background.⁷³

Genre is a slippery term that can be defined in a wide variety of ways. According to Faiza W. Shereen, a typical way that we recognize genre can be stated as follows: "the differentiation of genres is based on inductively discovered principles of construction, and is conjectural, not prescriptive."⁷⁴ We rely on conventions to identify a literary work with a particular genre or to differentiate its genre with other genres, and these conventions are typically comprised of the thematic and linguistic features of each genre. This approach to genre is similar to the (Russian) Formalism of the 1920s in literary theory, which Bakhtin and P. N. Medvedev—a close associate of Bakhtin—criticize.⁷⁵

According to Morson and Emerson, Medvedev's work, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, which was once published under the names of both Bakhtin and Medvedev, is nowadays generally recognized as a work of Medvedev.⁷⁶ As Morson and Emerson explain, Medvedev notes that the

73 Martin J. Buss, *Biblical Form Criticism in Its Context*, JSOTSup 274 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 15–20.

74 Shereen, "Form, Rhetoric, and Intellectual History," in *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. Patricia Waugh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 238.

75 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 271. See also Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, xv–xxxiii; Todorov, *The Dialogical Principle*, 3–13.

76 Medvedev and Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). This volume was originally published in Russian under the name of Medvedev and later attributed also to Bakhtin. See Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 101–19. See also Todorov, *The Dialogical Principle*, 8.

problem of the Formalists' concept of genre is to atomize a genre into small components.⁷⁷ In other words, the Formalists understand that genres are determined by linguistic/literary elements rather than the totality of the literary work. For example, a genre is a certain way of combining sentences, clauses, and words. Or, a genre is constructed by a unifying theme or idea that is, in turn, composed of smaller themes and ideas. For Formalists, a genre is a literary form that results from combining linguistic or thematic smaller units. Medvedev uses the words of Formalist Boris Tomashevsky, to explain this process of understanding of genre construction as follows: "The various sentences of the artistic expression combine according to meaning and result in a definite construction unified by a common idea or theme. Theme (what is talked about) is the unity of the meanings of the separate elements of the work."⁷⁸ For Medvedev, this is "atomism," and in Medvedev's understanding of genre, "atomism" is precisely why Formalists are wrong about genre. What is notable is that Tomashevsky understands "separate elements" as units that convey meanings independently from the whole work, and, therefore, the work as a whole becomes merely a mechanical construction of the elements, and the real meaning of genre is overlooked.⁷⁹ Medvedev finds such an example in Victor Shklovsky's analysis of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. According to Medvedev's criticism of Victor Shklovsky, who is considered to be an extreme Formalist, Shklovsky believes that "the complex and paradoxical figure of Don Quixote arose not to illustrate some philosophical or psychological insight, but as the purely accidental result" of the author's skillful amalgamation of inconsistent short stories.⁸⁰ In this regard, as Morson and Emerson explain, moral and philosophical lessons or psychological insights of literature are mere "by-products."⁸¹ Yet if genre is understood as a "totality of the artistic utterance,"⁸² what Formalists view as by-products are, in fact, the main products of a literary work, and this is the way that Medvedev understands genre. What should be noted is that analytic approaches, especially Formalism, overlook the importance of the totality of a literary work, and, as demonstrated in the case of Shklovsky's extreme adherence to the principle of Formalism, an atomization of literature tends to belittle the prowess of an artist as moral, philosophical, and psychological advisor. This is, in fact, what happens to Ecclesiastes when it is analyzed and disassembled into mere topical units and editorial steps.

77 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 272–73.

78 Medvedev and Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, 131.

79 Ibid., 129.

80 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 274.

81 Ibid., 272–75, especially 272 and 274.

82 Medvedev and Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, 129.

For Bakhtin and Medvedev, what is at issue in terms of genre is its function rather than the recognizing or distinguishing of a genre, not just because Formalists' analytic approaches eventually fail their tasks, but also because they trivialize the real purpose of literature—conveying certain messages. In terms of the basic function of genre, for Medvedev, genres are ways of “conceptualization of reality.”⁸³ In other words, a genre is a medium for an author to illustrate some aspects of his or her world and to deliver certain messages. Of course, the message of a literary work is an ideological product rooted in its historical realities as we see and comprehend reality through ideological lenses. Thus, what Medvedev means by genre as “conceptualization of reality” is that genres are ideological lenses, through which reality is conceptualized. Thus, as Medvedev explains relying on common stereotypes of two professions, the scientist observes certain aspects of life in his or her own ways that he or she develops from the discourses, which he or she “masters,” and that observed life through his or her mastery of those aspects of life are probably different from life that the artist observes; that is, certain aspects of life that the artist can see are “inaccessible” to the scientist, and vice versa.⁸⁴ Medvedev claims that “the reality of the genre is the social reality of its realization in the process of artistic intercourse.”⁸⁵ Here again, what needs to be noted is that genre distinction is not at issue in Medvedev's genre discussion. What is at stake is the function of genre.

Bakhtin's understanding of genre is quite similar to Medvedev's. Morson and Emerson note that, for Bakhtin, genre is “never shaped by design or integrated as a structure, [and] cannot be adequately described as or by a system of rules.”⁸⁶ Bakhtin regards genre as “form-shaping ideology.”⁸⁷ In terms of its ideological aspect, Morson and Emerson compare Bakhtin's notion of genre with the “eye” through which reality is perceived.⁸⁸ In other words, genre as an eye sees certain aspects of reality. It also means that genre does not see certain other aspects of reality. Thus, Morson and Emerson explain that “two genres view the world in fundamentally incompatible ways.... Each is adapted to conceptualizing some aspects of reality better than others.... Each genre is only able to control certain definite aspects of reality.”⁸⁹ Accordingly, new genres show us a new reality or world. In other words, emergence of new

83 Ibid., 134.

84 Ibid., 135.

85 Ibid.

86 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 293.

87 Ibid., 282.

88 Ibid., 275–77.

89 Ibid., 276.

views of reality or the world results in new genres that show a new reality. In terms of its formal aspect, reality can only be conceptualized in a literary work through literary expressions that we may conventionally recognize as literary forms. Therefore, genre as “conceptualization of reality” is inseparably combined with various literary forms. Medvedev argues that just as a painter’s observation is inseparable from his or her painting/representation, two components of genre—a way of thinking (ideology) and its expressions (form)—are likewise inseparable.⁹⁰ Thus, when views of reality arise, new expressions also arise to reflect a new reality. In sum, genre as a form-shaping ideology is a medium for illustrating ideologically conditioned aspects of reality in a certain literary form.

A world that is realized in a genre, then, is an ideological monologue because there is one governing ideology that presents reality. This type of genre can be understood as a monologic genre. As Bakhtin puts it, “a monologic artistic world does not recognize someone else’s thought, someone else’s idea.”⁹¹ Bakhtin goes on to argue that in a monologic genre someone else’s idea is “either assimilated, or polemically repudiated, or ceases to be an idea.”⁹² It is a usual type of literature where the reader expects to discover authorial semantic intention.

However, a literary work can contain multiple ideologies that are equally valid and dialogically related. For example, in terms of ideological components, the novel and novelized genres—genres that share key traits of a novel—can be categorized into two types: monologic and “polyphonic” genres. A monologic genre is, as explained, comprised of a single ideological consciousness that is typically represented by the author or the protagonist. The authorial voice solely governs the world that this type of genre portrays. By contrast, a polyphonic genre is comprised of multiple ideological consciousnesses that are independent and equally valid. As these consciousnesses are capable of engaging in true dialogue, each consciousness becomes a dialogic “voice” in polyphonic novel. In other words, a monologic genre turns into an ideological “voice” that dialogically interacts with other ideological voices. Especially in a dialogized interior monologue—a concept that I utilized to analyze Qohelet’s contradictory utterances, multiple ideological consciousnesses in a polyphonic novel are understood as voices that the protagonist comes into contact with. Those voices are dialogized in the protagonist’s consciousness. Multiple

90 Medvedev and Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, 134. Cf. Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 275.

91 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 79.

92 *Ibid.*, 85.

ideological consciousnesses that are isolated from any dialogue are simply monologic genres. Yet, in a polyphonic novel, they become dialogic voices, since these consciousnesses are placed in dialogues in a single literary work.

The world or reality conceptualized by multiple consciousnesses exhibits true dialogic interactions that monologic literature can never show. Monologic works may employ conversations to ultimately serve the author's intention, but, for Bakhtin, in true dialogue, a single governing ideological consciousness should not subordinate its conversing subjects or consciousnesses to itself. In this manner, for Bakhtin, Dostoevsky is the pioneer of the polyphonic genre in the history of literature. As mentioned in the discussion of Bakhtin's dialogue, Dostoevsky's novels are composed of "a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world,"⁹³ making Dostoevsky's novels truly dialogic. Bakhtin argues that "Dostoevsky 'created ... a completely new type of artistic thinking.... a new artistic model of the world.'"⁹⁴ As a new way of conceptualizing reality, Bakhtin recognizes Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel as a new genre that "makes available aspects of human experience never before accessible."⁹⁵

A further critique of Formalist approaches to genre that can be added here based on Bakhtin's understanding of genre is their inability to recognize the unfinalizability of genre that results from genre's dialogic nature. Of course, not all genres are unfinalizable. For Bakhtin, there are certain ancient and old genres that are already finalized. This means that, though Bakhtin fundamentally criticizes Formalist's atomism, an analytic approach to already-finalized ancient genres is not entirely irrelevant though the Formalist's basic approach to a literary work as an object of linguistic analysis remains its fundamental problem. In other words, Bakhtin seems to acknowledge the applicability of an analytic approach (or Formalism) to some genres.⁹⁶

In the case of other genres literary theory works confidently and precisely, since there is a finished and already formed object, definite and clear. These genres preserve their rigidity and canonic quality in all classical eras of their development; variations from era to era, from trend to trend or school to school are peripheral and do not affect their ossified generic skeleton.⁹⁷

93 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 6.

94 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 280.

95 Ibid., 281.

96 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 3–40.

97 Ibid., 8.

For Bakhtin, in contrast to novels and other novelized genres, some old genres, especially epics and the works of the neoclassical period that Bakhtin calls the “high literature” of the ruling social groups, are fully developed and even “antiquated,”⁹⁸ and, therefore, analyzable.

However, what can be inferred from the statement above is that unless certain genres are fully developed and have their “ossified generic skeletons,” an analytic approach cannot precisely define those genres. Bakhtin argues that the novel is a “young” genre that is now being “nourished in a new era”—though it does not mean that novelization—traits typical of novel—is something completely new that had never existed before.⁹⁹ In other words, the novel cannot be approached analytically because it is still growing and no generic skeleton has ever ossified. It is in the process of “becoming.”¹⁰⁰ As mentioned, the notion of “becoming” is characteristic of the nature of humans, whose identity is dialogically constructed without a fixed final destiny. For Bakhtin, the novel is a genre growing in response to contemporary realities that are themselves unpredictable and unfinalizable. What is more, Bakhtin believes that, after the second half of the eighteenth century, the novel became the dominant genre and “almost all the remaining genres are to a greater or lesser extent ‘novelized.’”¹⁰¹ For that reason, genre distinction based on its linguistic analysis is largely irrelevant for Bakhtin as genres are novelized in our time, and, as Bakhtin would insist, what we need to recognize in genre is how a certain genre conceptualizes the genre’s world. Also, we should note that, although the modern epoch is decisive for the emergence of the novel, Bakhtin also believes that the Hellenistic period, the late Middle Ages, and the Renaissance were also the times when literature was “caught up in the process of ‘becoming’” as a range of novelized genres also became dominant in those epochs.¹⁰² For example, as

98 Ibid., 3.

99 Ibid., 3–4. Sometimes, Bakhtin, in his use of the term “novel,” gives an impression that novel is not a new genre. For example, Bakhtin states that “of particular interest are those eras when the novel becomes the dominant genre.” In this case, by “novel,” Bakhtin does not seem to identify this “novel” with the novel in modern sense. Rather, the term “novel” here for Bakhtin means certain prosaic “low” literature as opposed to its contemporary “high literature” of ruling class that was finalized and has its “ossified generic skeletons.” To be clear, strictly speaking, we need to understand the term “novel,” in such a case, as “novelized genre” that has, due to the novelization, the traits, characteristics, or functions of modern novels, which are indeed completely new. See Ibid., 3–40, especially 5. See also Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 15–36.

100 I already mentioned “becoming” in the section where I discuss “nonmonologic unity” and “unfinalizability.” See p. 33 above.

101 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 5.

102 Ibid.

Bakhtin says, “in the era of Hellenism ... epic is already being transformed into novel [novelized genre],” and Bakhtin goes on to point out that “epic material is transposed into novelistic material.”¹⁰³ In other words, even old genres (but not the classic works themselves) in these times were “free and flexible” as they break the “ossified generic skeleton.”¹⁰⁴

Novelization of literature accompanies an interesting effect that is noteworthy. Bakhtin considers the high literature of the ruling class, already ossified and antiquated, as “dead languages,” and one of their characteristics is “seriousness” since they were supposed to be “high” literature distinguished from ordinary literature. These dead languages are now clearly distinguished from the novel as the novel is comprised of prosaic languages that are evergrowing and full of various emotions, not just “seriousness” since “prosaics” is our everyday language after all.¹⁰⁵ Thus, when literature is novelized as the novel becomes the dominant genre, even ossified and antiquated genres become prosaic and lose their seriousness. As Bakhtin puts it, “in an environment where the novel is the dominant genre, the conventional languages of strictly canonical genres begin to sound in new ways, which are quite different from the ways they sounded in those eras when the novel was not included in ‘high’ literature.”¹⁰⁶ According to Morson and Emerson, for example, “laughter and self-parody complicate tones of previously unquestioned seriousness; revered values find themselves in the daily marketplace of ideas and heroes from the ‘absolute past’ are reborn in the ‘familiar zone’ of the ‘open-ended present.’”¹⁰⁷

4.1 *Ecclesiastes and Bakhtin's Genre*

Several small genres constitute the text of Ecclesiastes. Due to this feature, the genre of Ecclesiastes is difficult to name. Crenshaw claims that “no single genre governs everything spoken [in Ecclesiastes].”¹⁰⁸ As Leo G. Perdue has it, “the book of Qoheleth has long vexed scholars seeking to recover the rhetorical structure and the literary form of its text.”¹⁰⁹ Perhaps, “wisdom literature” is the broadest category to which Ecclesiastes can belong. As discussed, however, with analytic approaches, the text of Ecclesiastes cannot properly be labeled. The books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, Ben Sira, and Wisdom of Solomon

¹⁰³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁵ For the concept of “prosaics,” see Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 15–36.

¹⁰⁶ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 304.

¹⁰⁸ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 28.

¹⁰⁹ Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 203.

are commonly recognized as wisdom literature, but, as John J. Collins notices, this categorization is “not identified by a systematic literary analysis, but is an impressionistic, intuitive grouping of books that seem to have something in common.”¹¹⁰ What Collins’s claim implies is that, though “wisdom literature” is recognized as a useful boundary in biblical studies, the nature of each text in this category rejects the boundary of “wisdom literature” as a prescriptive designation. In terms of the genre of Ecclesiastes, Brown rightly points out that “the work is a messy mixture of autobiographical references, theological reflections, philosophical musings, and proverbial instructions.” Brown goes on to argue that “Ecclesiastes is *sui generis* in the literary landscape.”¹¹¹ In other words, Ecclesiastes is unique and does not belong to any genre if formalistically approached. Probably for this reason, Brown’s analysis of the genre of Ecclesiastes appropriately ends with the conclusion that it is ultimately not to be identified with any known genre.¹¹²

One of the reasons that Bakhtin’s and Medvedev’s concept of genre is useful for the discussion of the genre of Ecclesiastes is that their concept helps the reader of Ecclesiastes appreciate the totality of the text despite the text’s small, formal components, which make Ecclesiastes look like a messy mixture of fragmentary texts.¹¹³ Analytic approaches tend to belittle the literary virtuosity of the totality of the work concentrating too much on its messiness. Bakhtin and Medvedev’s genre discussion, however, enables us to recognize the virtuosity of the messy composition of Ecclesiastes by providing us two important concepts, unfinalized genre and polyphonic novel.

110 Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 1.

111 Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 17.

112 Ibid.

113 As discussed, although many scholars, nowadays, take Ecclesiastes as a whole despite the contradictions, it also has been a lingering tendency among many scholars to see at least the epilogue (12:9–14) as one or more glossators’ work because it shows a radical change of rhetoric. This is one of the problems that the modern standard for unity of a text possesses. Those scholars include A. Wright, Norbert Lohfink, Gerald T. Sheppard, Gerald H. Wilson, and Katharine J. Dell. See A. Wright, “The Riddle of the Sphinx”; Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Sean McEvenue (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Sheppard, “The Epilogue to Qoheleth as Theological Commentary,” *CBQ* 39, no. 2 (1977): 182–89; Wilson, “‘The Words of the Wise’: The Intent and Significance of Qohelet 12:9–14,” *JBL* 103, no. 2 (1984): 175–92; Dell, “Ecclesiastes as Wisdom: Consulting Early Interpreters,” *VT* 44, no. 3 (1994): 301–29. For many scholars, the function of the epilogue (12:9–14) is to make an unconventional text Ecclesiastes acceptable to faith communities.

4.1.1 Ecclesiastes and Unfinalized Genre

A further, important issue in dealing with the genre of Ecclesiastes from a Bakhtin's perspective is whether or not the genre of Ecclesiastes is considered to be unfinalizable despite its ancientness. To be unfinalizable, Ecclesiastes should belong to a "novelized" genre. A novelized genre is in the process of becoming because it breaks the "ossified generic skeleton," and its language is free and flexible. One of the characteristics of a novelized genre is its adopting languages of various genres. In this respect, Ecclesiastes shows some traits of novelization. According to Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes is composed of "royal testament," "parable," "diatribe," and "instruction," but "no single genre governs everything spoken."¹¹⁴ Choon-Leong Seow similarly observes that there are many parallel texts in ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian literature in terms of themes and literary techniques, but Seow's intention is to heuristically discover "a few insights regarding the genres that are employed in the book" rather than defining the genre.¹¹⁵ For Fox, Ecclesiastes is a combination of several ancient genres such as "maxims and proverbs," "autobiography," "royal testament," and "narrative." According to Perdue, Egyptian grave autobiographies and Greek tomb inscriptions are the most similar type of literature to Ecclesiastes.¹¹⁶ Of course, Ecclesiastes probably imitates the range of those genres, but Ecclesiastes itself is no tomb inscription per se nor is it finally a royal inscription (1:12–2:26). Scholars have identified that it is also not merely or fully a collection of proverbs or a wisdom instruction like Proverbs although sections of the book (7:1–14 and 10:1–20) draw on those genres.¹¹⁷ All these scholars' observations seem to indicate that Ecclesiastes does not show features of a "finalized genre" but rather exhibits a dialogic process that shapes the form. If we acknowledge that Ecclesiastes is a genre that creatively incorporates or utilizes the various forms of literature of its time, then, Ecclesiastes, indeed, is a novelized ancient literature that is unique in terms of its genre. In this regard, what Bakhtin calls a "novelized genre" seems applicable to the genre of Ecclesiastes. Indeed, Bakhtin identified some Hellenistic texts as novelized. Therefore, Ecclesiastes as a product of Hellenistic era can be fruitfully analyzed on his terms.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 28–31.

¹¹⁵ Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18C (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 60–65.

¹¹⁶ Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 209.

¹¹⁷ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 48. See also Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 206.

¹¹⁸ For the novelization of genres in the Hellenistic period, see pp. 42–43 above.

4.1.2 Ecclesiastes as a Polyphonic Fiction

As discussed, according to Medvedev and Bakhtin, the totality of a literary work rather than its linguistic and thematic components determines its genre, and, based on Bakhtin's notion of unfinalized genres, Ecclesiastes can be understood as a polyphonic fiction, an ancient novelized genre. Like Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel, the multiple consciousnesses or voices discernible in Ecclesiastes dialogically conceptualize the world of Qohelet. An important concept that we need to recall here is that, for Bakhtin, a genre as a form-shaping ideology, which conceptualizes a world in its own way, becomes a dialogic "voice" in a polyphonic genre. Like a Dostoevsky novel, so too Ecclesiastes can be regarded as polyphonic. What might have remained as a monologue that carries only the authorial semantic intention (i.e., the discourse of tomb inscription, royal autobiography, proverbial collection and so forth) now becomes a lively voice in Ecclesiastes that is dialogically related to other voices. In a monologic genre, such a voice is sealed off and blind to all other worlds that other voices conceptualize and represent. In a polyphonic literature such as Ecclesiastes or a Dostoevsky novel, the voices are in dialogue, and the totality of the text visualizes the complexity of its world, and human experiences, which, in monologic genres, were inaccessible.¹¹⁹ If Bakhtin knew the polyphonic character of Ecclesiastes, he might have commended the author of Ecclesiastes as he commends Dostoevsky.

The contradictions in Ecclesiastes, which have been recognized as a sign of the book's disunity, can be seen as the unity of a polyphonic genre through Bakhtin's insights. Though scholars have variously identified the small genres or forms of speech in Ecclesiastes, these are better understood as voices, the form-shaping ideologies that conceptualize their own worlds that together show Ecclesiastes to be a kind of novelized discourse in a Bakhtinian sense. Bakhtin believed that monologic texts are not equipped to properly show the potential for the unforeseen of human life, because life by its nature is dialogic. Through the polyphonic monologue, the author of Ecclesiastes realizes unfinalizability (or freedom and creativity) of a literary character, Qohelet. This cannot be adequately accomplished in a monologic text in which every event is under the control of a single/authorial consciousness.

119 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 281.

5 Bakhtinian Reading of Qohelet's Contradictions

The mode of thinking that is rooted in modernism has hindered many readers of Ecclesiastes from recognizing the text's totality as a book. By employing Bakhtin's concept of genre, this study tries to overcome the epistemological limitation of modernism and approaches the text as a "book." The contradictions do not have to be the signs of disunity but a feature of polyphonic genres that convey the dialogues of multiple consciousnesses or voices that conceptualize their own ideological worlds. Qohelet in his dialogized interior monologue embraces multiple ideological voices and vacillates among them. Though a single character, Qohelet resonates with multiple voices. He is in the midst of internal conflicts, and his dialogue with himself is unfinalizable as those voices never surrender their own ideologies.

In this respect, understanding the contradictions in Ecclesiastes requires the reader to investigate ideological struggles of Qohelet's time. In other words, to understand Ecclesiastes the reader must recognize and hear the voices or discourses that Qohelet experienced and incorporated in his context. To do so, in the following chapters, I will try to date the text to locate Qohelet in his historical circumstances, and investigate discourses of various ideologies that have shaped Qohelet's contradictions.

The Historical Scope of Qohelet's Dialogic Utterances

As introduced in the previous chapter, in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov, the protagonist of the novel, becomes a space of dialogue of multiple consciousnesses as he receives his mother's letter. In this dialogue within Raskolnikov's monologue, the participating voices are not subordinate to the authorial voice or Raskolnikov's, but rather maintain their own ideological worlds where they find their unique social locations and ways to cope with their realities. Those consciousnesses are shaped by sociohistorical realities, and they conceptualize certain aspects of those realities. By the same token, the voices in Qohelet's interior dialogue are rooted in Qohelet's sociohistorical realities though it should be considered that, however much precisely one can date the text, it is not possible to precisely reconstruct the life experiences of Qohelet and exact voices with which Qohelet came into contact. Reading is a process in which the past and the present are tangled up with each other through the reader's imagination. Historical research can never bridge the gap between the text's exact past and the readers' own time without the researcher's imagination. As a literary character, Qohelet will, in some sense, remain a reader's imaginative construction based on the available knowledge of the past. Nonetheless, in order to listen to the dialogue in Qohelet's monologue (or Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue in Bakhtin's term), the reader has to strive to locate Qohelet within his historical realities.

In the twentieth century, most critical scholars agreed that the third century BCE is the most plausible date for Ecclesiastes, based mainly on the book's linguistic features. For example, Gordis dates Ecclesiastes to 275–250 BCE, and Francesco Bianchi notes that “a certain consensus seemed to be reached by the scholars in accordance with Gordis' position.”¹ However, there is an escalated

1 Robert Gordis, “Koheleth: Hebrew or Aramaic?,” *JBL* 71, no. 2 (1952): 93–109. See also Bianchi, “The Language of Qohelet: A Bibliographical Survey,” *ZAW* 105, no. 2 (1993): 210–23. Here are some of the scholars among many who date the text to the third century BCE: Crenshaw (250–225 BCE); Thomas Krüger (250–200 BCE, perhaps 204 BCE); Perdue (late third century BCE); Martin Hengel (270–220 BCE); Fox (third century BCE). See Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 50; Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary*, trans. O. C. Dean Jr., Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 19; Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 200; Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period*, trans. John Bowden, 2 vols.

awareness of the fact that the language of Ecclesiastes alone cannot be a solid ground for dating the book, and, consequently, recent scholarly works show a more careful attitude about dating of Ecclesiastes.² In other words, despite the general consensus that we now have, dating Ecclesiastes is oddly still a controversial topic among biblical scholars that is worth our attention, and it seems necessary for us to examine what has been discussed regarding dating Ecclesiastes in order to proceed to explore Qohelet's sociohistorical context that generated Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue.³ To do so, I will first seek to delimit the possible time frame of the text's date of composition within a wide range. Next, I will briefly evaluate the importance of the wide range as a context that nurtured Qohelet's complex thoughts. But I will ultimately argue that the third century BCE should still be the most plausible time of Ecclesiastes composition and, accordingly, the most immediate sociohistorical context of Qohelet's discourse. Of course, I do not intend to prove the date of Ecclesiastes, nor do I confine Qohelet within one or two prominent discourses of his time. But given the circumstances where the consensus has been challenged, it seems necessary to lay the historical foundation of this study in the most probable fashion possible before engaging further discussion on Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue.

1 A Conventional Linguistic Delimitation of the Context of Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is considered to be a product of the third century BCE by the majority of Ecclesiastes scholars, but, if we are to broaden the text's historical

(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1974; Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 116. Citations refer to the Wipf and Stock edition; Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes* קהלת, The JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), xiv.

- 2 For example, Koosed, though she rejects the Solomonic authorship, does not specify the date. See Koosed, (*Per*)mutations of Qohelet, 23–24. Gary D. Salyer mentions the general consensus about the dating of the text, but he himself avoids joining the debates and defers the issue to the “historical grammarians.” See Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 139. In order to emphasize ambiguities as a design of the text, Doug Ingram, quoting Seow, indicates that scholars have dated the text from the tenth century BCE to the first century CE. See Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes*, 271. Cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, ix. Weeks follows the general consensus but does not exclude the possibility of the Persian period. See Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 5.
- 3 The following comment of Mitchell S. J. Dahood tells us the trouble that the dating of the text has caused scholars in the past: “finally, a large number of scholars did not commit themselves (at least in writing) but preferred to adopt a wait-and-see attitude.” Dahood, “Qoheleth and Recent Discoveries,” *Biblica* 39, no. 3 (1958): 302–18.

location to a more generally acceptable extent, the range of 500–200 BCE will probably be the widest time frame of the text's composition among critical scholars. In the following, I will discuss the key factors that delimit the text within that time frame.

1.1 *The Problems of Solomonic Authorship and Terminus Post Quem*

In Ecclesiastes, Qohelet is introduced as a king in Jerusalem over Israel, a son of David, whose wisdom surpassed everyone before him (Eccl 1:1, 12). The figure implied in this introduction is, of course, Solomon, who was not only a king of the united Israel but also the legendary figure of wisdom (1 Kgs 3–10). A generation ago, the imminent Bible scholar G. L. Archer, who held an inerrantist view of scripture, offered arguments for the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes.⁴ Nowadays, however, one can hardly find any critical scholar who still argues for the Solomonic authorship of the text. Indeed, there are good reasons to push the earliest possible date forward from Solomon's time to the Persian period—to about 500 BCE.

Martin Luther is sometimes considered to be the one who first rejected the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes, and Hugo Grotius also claimed the same in 1644.⁵ According to Barton, Luther, in his *Table Talk*, said that “Solomon himself did not write the book of Ecclesiastes but it was produced by Sirach at the time of the Maccabees.... It is a sort of Talmud, compiled from many books, probably from the library of King Ptolemy Euergetes of Egypt.”⁶ Though now most scholars reject Sirach's involvement with the composition of Ecclesiastes, Luther's observation is still noteworthy. However, Scott C. Jones argues that Luther only denied the fact that the author of Ecclesiastes is a scribe but not the Solomonic authorship itself.⁷ According to Eric S. Christianson, the version that Barton cites as Luther's words are suspected to be corrupted, and, therefore, there might be a chance that Luther, in fact, did not question the Solomonic authorship at all.⁸ Barton also reports Grotius's comments on the language of Ecclesiastes as follows: “I believe that the book is not the

4 Archer, “The Linguistic Evidence for the Date of ‘Ecclesiastes,’” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12, no. 3 (1969): 167–81.

5 Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 21. See also Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, trans. M. G. Easton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1891), 190; Bianchi, “The Language of Qohelet: A Bibliographical Survey,” 210–23; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 11; Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 44.

6 Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 21.

7 Jones, “Solomon's Table Talk: Martin Luther on the Authorship of Ecclesiastes,” *SJOT* 28, no. 1 (2014): 81–90.

8 Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 95–96.

production of Solomon.... It contains many words which cannot be found except in Ezra, Daniel and the Chaldee paraphrasts.”⁹ Grotius’s recognition of vocabularies in Ecclesiastes that are rare in biblical Hebrew is of particular importance. Agreeing with Grotius’s observation, Delitzsch famously claims that “if the Book of Koheleth were of old Solomonic origin, then there is no history of the Hebrew language.”¹⁰ Schoors also notes that “the thesis advanced by Grotius was rapidly adopted during the 18th and 19th centuries.”¹¹

Some of the most important features that characterize the language of Ecclesiastes as postexilic are its frequent use of *matres lectionis*, abundant Aramaisms, and its close affinities with Ben Sira and Mishnaic Hebrew, which are *generally* considered to be the traits of Late Biblical Hebrew (or LBH).¹² However, these features are not exclusively attested in the postexilic period, and this suggests that we cannot precisely periodize the chronological development of the language. Therefore, the claim that the language of Ecclesiastes can be aligned with LBH has been somewhat controversial. While I will discuss the details of the controversies later in this chapter, the most decisive factor for most scholars demonstrating that Ecclesiastes is a postexilic product are probably Persian loan words. According to Seow, there are two Persian loanwords in Ecclesiastes, פֶּרֶדָּס (“orchard,” 2:5) and פֶּתֶגֶם (“verdict,” 8:11), that confirm that the book cannot be dated earlier than the early fourth century BCE.¹³ Seow argues that though some scholars contend that some Persian loan words are also dated to the preexilic period, “there is no clear evidence of Persianisms prior to the Achaemenid period.”¹⁴ Seow’s analysis, in fact, demonstrates that no Persian loan words are dated prior to 500 BCE.¹⁵ In other words, 500 BCE sets terminus post quem for Ecclesiastes. If one dates Ecclesiastes based on

9 Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 21.

10 Delitzsch, *The Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, 190.

11 Antoon Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth*, vol. 1, *Grammar*, OLA 41 (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1992), 1.

12 For information about Late Biblical Hebrew, see Eduard Yechezkel Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, ed. Raphael Kutscher (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982), 81–85; Robert Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward An Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose*, HSM 12 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976).

13 Choon-Leong Seow, “Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qohelet,” *JBL* 115, no. 4 (1996): 643–66; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 20. See also Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, 52. Daniel C. Fredericks is one of the scholars who reject that Persian loan words are decisive evidence of the lateness of Ecclesiastes. See Fredericks, *Qoheleth’s Language: Re-evaluating Its Nature and Date*, Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies 3 (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 242–45.

14 Seow, “Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qohelet,” 648.

15 *Ibid.*, 649.

the passages that allude Solomon's authorship of the text, the language of the book should also reflect biblical Hebrew of the tenth century BCE. However, the two Persian loan words betray the much later date of its composition.

1.2 *Qumran Manuscript and Terminus Ante Quem*

The discovery of fragments of Ecclesiastes at Qumran, which are dated to the mid-second century BCE, provides also an important source for dating Ecclesiastes. After the discovery of Ecclesiastes fragments in Cave IV of the Qumran caves, James Muilenburg published an article in 1954 that significantly advanced the studies on the date of Ecclesiastes. Muilenburg reports that we have four fragments, two relatively large and two small; the leather quality is excellent, and letters are beautifully written; and the fragments exhibit large parts of Eccl 6:3–8, a few words in Eccl 5:13–17, and five words in Eccl 7:7–9.¹⁶ More importantly, Muilenburg notices the paleographical affinities of the Ecclesiastes fragments with some other Qumran finds that are dated to the first century BCE, such as Isaiah A (1QIsa^a) and Community Rule (1QS).¹⁷ Another paleographical kin that Muilenburg identifies with the Ecclesiastes fragments is the Edfu papyri in Egypt that are dated to the latter part of the third century BCE.¹⁸ According to Muilenburg, the Qumran fragments of Ecclesiastes display paleographic features that can be placed somewhere between 1QIsa^a/1QS (ca. the first century BCE) and the Edfu Papyri (ca. the latter part of the third century BCE). In Muilenburg's words, "from a paleographic standpoint, therefore, one must date our fragments about the middle of the second century BC."¹⁹ This sets *terminus ante quem* for Ecclesiastes. Since the Essene copy of Ecclesiastes is dated to the second century BCE, the actual date of the composition should be earlier than its copy. One must also consider the time necessary for the book to gain a reputation and wide circulation before the reproduction of the text in the Essene community. All these factors demonstrate that Ecclesiastes should have been written no later than ca. 200 BCE.

In addition, Ecclesiastes' linguistic affinities with Ben Sira make 200 BCE—as the latest possible date for the book's composition—more persuasive. For

16 Muilenburg, "A Qoheleth Scroll From Qumran," *BASOR* 135 (1954): 20–28. See also Eugene Ulrich et al., eds. *Qumran Cave 4*, vol. 11, *Psalms to Chronicles*, DJD 16 (Oxford: Oxford University Press / Clarendon Press, 2000), 221–27.

17 In Muilenburg's article, Isaiah A (1QIsa^a) is designated as DSIa, and Community Rule (1QS) as Manual of Discipline according to an older rule. See Muilenburg, "A Qoheleth Scroll From Qumran," 23.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid. See also Ulrich et al., *Qumran Cave 4*, 11:221.

Wido van Peursen, "the books of Ben Sira and Qohelet display many similarities not only linguistically, but also in genre and content."²⁰ Van Peursen points out that if the transition from the biblical Hebrew to Mishnaic Hebrew happened gradually, the Hebrew of Ben Sira is representative of this transition.²¹ Avi Hurvitz argues that Ben Sira is the product of an intermediate era between biblical and rabbinic literature.²² Since it is generally acknowledged that the date of Ben Sira is the early second century BCE, what can be inferred from Ecclesiastes' linguistic affinities with Ben Sira is that the date of composition of Ecclesiastes might be close to but earlier than the date of Ben Sira.²³ If Ben Sira utilized Ecclesiastes as some scholars argue, the *terminus ante quem*, which can be set to the mid-second century BCE because of the date of Qumran fragments, could be set even to the early second century BCE. In fact, based on phrasal parallels between Ecclesiastes and Ben Sira, Gordis argues that "Koheleth in turn served as a source for two important Apocryphal books, Ben Sira and Wisdom of Solomon, which thus supply a *terminus non post quem* for the date of Koheleth."²⁴

Most scholars, including myself, acknowledges the latest possible date that Gordis sets for Ecclesiastes. Sheppard, however, argues that Eccl 12:13–14, where the reader is advised to fear God and keep God's commandments, is a theological commentary, the ideology of which is "exactly the same" as that of Ben Sira.²⁵ Thus, Sheppard argues that the redactor of those verses "either knew

20 Van Peursen, *The Verbal System in the Hebrew Text of Ben Sira* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 403.

21 Ibid., 55–56.

22 Hurvitz, "The Linguistic Status of Ben Sira as a Link Between Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew: Lexicographical Aspects," in *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira: Proceedings of a Symposium Held at Leiden University, 11–14 December 1995*, ed. Takamitsu Muraoka and John. F. Elwolde, STDJ (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 73.

23 In terms of the date of Ben Sira, the first quarter of the second century BCE is a majority opinion among scholars: Collins (somewhere in the first quarter of the second century BCE); Crenshaw (between 195–180 BCE, likely ca. 185 BCE); David Arthur deSilva (between 196 and 175 BCE); Daniel J. Harrington (about 180 BCE); David S. Williams (ca. 175 BCE). See Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 23; James L. Crenshaw, "The Book of Sirach," in *NIB*, vol. 5 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 610–11; DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 157–58; Harrington, *Invitation to the Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 79; Williams, "The Date of Ecclesiasticus," *VT* 44, no. 4 (1994): 563–66.

24 Gordis, *Koheleth, the Man and His World*, 46–49. See also Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 53–56. According to Crenshaw, Charles F. Whitley tried to prove that the language of Ecclesiastes is later than Ben Sira, and even Daniel, in order to argue that Ecclesiastes used Ben Sira, not vice versa. However, Crenshaw claims that Whitley's project failed to convince scholars. See Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 50. Cf. Whitley, *Koheleth: His Language and Thought* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979).

25 Sheppard, "The Epilogue to Qoheleth as Theological Commentary," 187.

of Sirach or shared fully in a similar, pervasive estimate of sacred wisdom.”²⁶ Moreover, for Sheppard, “Qoheleth has been thematized by the epilogue in order to include it fully within a ‘canon conscious’ definition of sacred wisdom, one that is remarkably similar to that of Sirach and Baruch.”²⁷ As intimated, however, Sheppard’s claim about the ideological connection between Eccl 12:13–14 and Ben Sira did not successfully convince scholars. Fearing God and obeying God’s commandments are not Ben Sira’s unique ideological claims; for example, these are also readily discernible ideological features of Proverbs. Thus, Ecclesiastes should have been written earlier than Ben Sira. In this respect, considering the two Persian loan words that set the earliest possible date as 500 BCE, the date of the composition of Ecclesiastes should come in the range of ca. 500–200 BCE.

This range may seem too broad to locate Qohelet in his own context. Without narrowing it down, listening to the dialogue in Qohelet’s dialogized interior monologue also might seem an unattainable task. However, it should be considered that, unlike Raskolnikov’s interior dialogue with his contemporary voices, Qohelet’s dialogic contact with various voices lies in a much wider range of intellectual traditions that arose and had developed for an extensive amount of time. As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, the Persian period appears to be not only an important cultural soil that cultivated, sustained, and nurtured the development of various intellectual traditions in Israel, but also a vehicle that transmitted those traditions to the early Hellenistic era. The Persian period became a larger discursive background for Qohelet’s utterances. In fact, Seow even dates the text to the Persian era because he finds “a cluster of economic and legal terms” in Ecclesiastes that are “at home in the socioeconomic world of the Persian empire in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.”²⁸ While I do not adopt Seow’s dating for this study, his study helpfully demonstrates that the Persian period is, indeed, an important discursive background of Ecclesiastes. In terms of the continuity of the voices in the time frame of 500–200 BCE, therefore, investigating the wide range of

26 Ibid.

27 Sheppard’s thesis, however, does not answer the old question asked by Gordis: “none of these scholars seeks to explain why the book was deemed worthy of this effort to ‘legitimize’ it, when it could so easily have been suppressed.” See Sheppard, “The Epilogue to Qoheleth as Theological Commentary,” 188. See also Gordis, *Koheleth, the Man and His World*, 71. In addition, the two verses in the epilogue, which, Sheppard believes, make Qohelet’s speeches fully suitable to the canon, do not seem to have a significant impact on the overall radical teachings of Qohelet widespread in the entire text.

28 Seow, “Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qohelet,” 665.

intellectual traditions as Qohelet's context is still an important task to better understand Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue.

2 Bakhtinian Reevaluation of the Language of Ecclesiastes

Though the range of 500–200 BCE suggested above should be considered to be an important context that nourished Qohelet's complex and often contradictory thoughts, the theory of the third century BCE, which is still considered to be the most plausible date of the text's composition despite some controversies, is worth further reevaluation.

Thus far, scholars who date Ecclesiastes to the third century BCE have relied mainly on its linguistic features that are considered to be characteristics of LBH. However, some scholars, especially Daniel C. Fredericks, quite seriously challenged the lateness of the language of Ecclesiastes by demonstrating that the book's supposed late features are also attested in classical biblical Hebrew.²⁹ But these scholars, in fact, have not proved the Persian or earlier periods as the historical epoch to which the text's composition is indisputably to be dated. At most, what they do is to suggest that the linguistic features of Ecclesiastes may not exclusively be the features of LBH or belong to the last phase of biblical Hebrew. Thus, as mentioned, recent scholarly works tend to show more cautious attitudes toward the theory of the third century BCE or dating of the text in general. Given such ambiguous circumstances, Bakhtin's insights on language can help explain how an evaluation of the lateness of the language of Ecclesiastes is justified even though the so-called late linguistic features are also attested in early Biblical Hebrew or not exclusively appear in late biblical texts. In other words, the third century BCE can be more confidently viewed as the most plausible context of Qohelet's interior dialogue based not merely on the text's linguistic elements but also on Bakhtin's notion of language.

2.1 *The Dialogic Life of Language*

For Bakhtin, language is not simply an object of linguistic studies but is rather composed of living utterances.³⁰ What is implied in this notion of language is that language as utterances has a dialogic life. As mentioned, for Bakhtin,

29 According to Schoors, "Fredericks totally upsets ... the *communis opinio* about its late post-exilic date." Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 1:14.

30 Todorov, *The Dialogical Principle*, 25.

*"To be means to communicate,"*³¹ and this means that language and the construction of the human mind are inseparably connected. Unless uttered by a real person, there is no language. In other words, language that can only exist by utterances of humans—the dialogic beings—also exist only dialogically. Therefore, the social dimension of language—understood not merely as an object of linguistic analysis but as *utterances* that emerge out of social conditions—should be taken into account to date of Ecclesiastes and eventually comprehend Qohelet's utterances in his context.

Moreover, considering the dialogic nature of language, we should also consider that what is uttered in any language in a specific historical reality, for Bakhtin, can never be "new words" but is always related to what has already been spoken in the past. In other words, behind a language's chronological changes, there is a significant history of dialogue that has proceeded only in unpredictable ways as there cannot be an authorial voice that controls all the dialogic voices in dialogue. As Morson and Emerson put it, language, for Bakhtin, is "messy and disorganized," and this messiness is the result of the complexities of daily living, with all its unforeseen, small, prosaic purposes and shifts in mood and evaluation, which are not reducible to a system."³² Even though there is always a force that tries to regulate language, using certain devices such as grammar and lexicography, our daily uses of language, according to Morson and Emerson, *"for no particular reason* continually disrupt that order."³³ As Morson and Emerson point out, language cannot be described as a system due to "the tiny and unsystematic alterations"³⁴ in our ordinary uses of language. In other words, biblical Hebrew can never be precisely periodized.

Nevertheless, all languages do go through chronological changes. Therefore, it is still possible to estimate the date of a text based on linguistic analysis, at least roughly, because a language's complex life does not preclude the possibility that there are, in fact, discernible chronological changes in linguistic elements of language, though we cannot be certain about those chronological changes. In the following, in light of Bakhtin's insights on language/utterance, I will demonstrate how Qohelet's utterances in Ecclesiastes are dialogically developed (or related to the past) and also why his utterances are still best understood as a product of the early Hellenistic era.

31 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 287.

32 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 30, 139.

33 Ibid., 30.

34 Ibid., 139.

2.2 *The Dialogic Life of LBH*

From a Bakhtinian perspective, one of the reasons that the linguistic components in Ecclesiastes arouse controversy in scholarly discourse about the lateness of the text's language is that LBH itself is already a contested characterization of Hebrew that can never precisely be systemized and periodized. For example, concerning the difference between early biblical Hebrew and LBH, Joshua Blau argues that "the differences between these layers are unexpectedly slight; and Biblical language, though stemming from all parts of Eretz Israel over a very long period, is surprisingly uniform."³⁵ Chaim Rabin, by contrast, argues that "the Hebrew of the later books of the Bible differs markedly from that of the pre-exilic corpus."³⁶ Under modernism, the polarization of understandings on biblical Hebrew might have been an unavoidable result because modernists tend to reduce what is genuinely complex into something clear and simple. However, the language used in the postexilic period is, in fact, an unfinalizable complexity resulting from the history of real dialogic utterances. A language, as mentioned, is always messy and disorganized because of its dialogic life. As "today's language" emerges in response to the past, LBH can be both markedly different from and unexpectedly similar to early biblical Hebrew. In other words, biblical Hebrew clearly shows some chronological development, but at the same time, these developmental processes are always dialogically related to the past. In this respect, the modern controversy on the linguistic analysis and periodization of biblical Hebrew rather paradoxically testify to the traces of the dialogic life of biblical Hebrew. Some linguistic features of early or classical biblical Hebrew, therefore, form part of "late" utterances insofar as those utterances emerge in response to earlier ones.

Besides the general sorts of evaluations regarding the nature of LBH, one can also note that since Julius Wellhausen's famous documentary hypothesis in which he dates the so-called "priestly source" to the postexilic period, there has been much debate over the relationship of LBH to date the P source. Due to the polarized ideas about the language of LBH, the date of P has been controversial as well. For example, Carolus Victor Ryssel rejects the linguistic lateness of P, and, in response to Ryssel, Robert Polzin argues for the lateness of P through his thorough linguistic investigation of the language of the Chronicler,

35 Blau, "The Historical Periods of the Hebrew Language," in *Jewish Languages: Theme and Variations*, ed. Herbert H. Paper (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 1978), 2. Despite his claim about "surprisingly uniform" Blau identifies three layers of biblical Hebrew: "archaic Biblical Hebrew," "pre-exilic Classical Hebrew prose," and "post-exilic prose." See *Ibid.*, 1–2.

36 Rabin, "Hebrew," in *Current Trends in Linguistics: Linguistics in South West Asia and North Africa*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 316.

agreeing with Rabin's claim that LBH is markedly different from early biblical Hebrew.³⁷ Gary Rendsburg, however, rejects Polzin's thesis as well as Polzin's understanding of LBH; Rendsburg dates the language of P to the preexilic period.³⁸ Out of such debates, Victor Hurowitz suggests a compromise between the two opposite opinions, arguing that "even if P reached its final form in the postexilic period, its content, language and style are firmly planted in the literature and customs of the First Temple period."³⁹

Again, what the debates among these scholars suggest is once again the unsystematizable complexity of language that Bakhtin advocates. One problem with this scholarly opinion is its urge to finalize Hebrew as if it can be dichotomized into "early" and "late." Bakhtin's understanding of the dialogic nature of a language would not insist merely that the language is either early *or* late; or, as Hurowitz would have it, the language is not just *both* early *and* late though that is an advance. For Bakhtin, language is never systematically defined as "early" and "late," and it is always used in dialogue and accented differently by different social groups even in the same period. Labeling Hebrew language of a specific period "LBH" is a reduction of a complex cultural entity into a well-organized system. Consequently, with regard to the same linguistic elements, some scholars align P with LBH and some others do not. Nevertheless, as I argued, the controversies suggest the dialogic life that Hebrew has lived rather than the need to retreat to complete agnosticism about chronological changes. Periodization of biblical Hebrew, therefore, can be utilized to initially recognize the complexity of Hebrew in a simplistic manner or to approximately date a given biblical text. One should always be aware, however, that language is, rather, a complex cultural entity that cannot be precisely periodized based solely on its linguistic grounds, and therefore, the utterances of the text, which are, unlike mere linguistic components, inseparably connected to their sociohistorical context, should be examined together to estimate the date of the text.

37 It was 1971 when Polzin first argued his thesis through his dissertation, and in 1976, he published a revised version of his dissertation. Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew*. Cf. Ryssel, "De elohistae Pentateuchici sermone: commentatio historico-critica" (doctoral dissertation, Academia Lipsiensis, 1878).

38 Rendsburg, "Late Biblical Hebrew and the Date of P," *JANES* 12 (1980): 65–80. See also Avi Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship Between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel: A New Approach to An Old Problem*, CahRB 20 (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1982), 163–70.

39 Hurowitz, "P-Understanding the Priestly Source," *BRev* 12, no. 3 (1996): 30–37, 44–47.

2.3 *The Dialogic Aspects of LBH in Ecclesiastes*

The debate on the language of Ecclesiastes shows the same pattern found in the debates about the date of P as well as LBH. Some scholars, though a significant minority, seriously unsettle the consensus about the third century BCE as the text's date of composition. Among them, Fredericks most thoroughly and seriously disputes the lateness of the language of Ecclesiastes. As will be discussed, the debate is mostly centering around the lateness and earliness of three linguistic features that are regularly recognized as major traits of LBH in Ecclesiastes and so are used to justify the early Hellenistic period as the text's date of composition. The three key features are: (1) the presence of a high frequency of Aramaisms, (2) significant use of *matres lectionis*, and (3) the affinities with Mishnaic Hebrew (and Ben Sira).

2.3.1 The Problems of Aramaisms

One of the controversial linguistic features of Ecclesiastes that have been regarded as signs of the late date of Ecclesiastes is the text's Aramaisms. According to Seow, "most scholars recognize an unusually high frequency of Aramaisms"⁴⁰ in the book, and this feature is often viewed as evidence that Ecclesiastes was composed when Aramaic was the vernacular language in Palestine, namely, the postexilic period. However, because of the unclear boundary between early and postexilic Aramaisms in biblical Hebrew, as well as the history of the close relationship between Hebrew and Aramaic, whether or not Aramaisms can be an indicator of the late date of biblical texts, including Ecclesiastes, has been much debated among scholars.⁴¹ For example, Seow argues that one of the most repeated words in Ecclesiastes, *hābēl*, is an "aramaized variant" of *hebel*.⁴² As one of the prominent opponents of the third-century theory, Fredericks, however, argues that the shortened first syllable of *segholates* is also attested in early biblical Hebrew whether it is an Aramaism or not, and a different vocalization does not necessarily indicate its Aramaic influence.⁴³ Fredericks argues that because Ecclesiastes is not only a wisdom

40 Seow, "Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qohelet," 650; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 12.

41 Kutscher points out that "Aramaic entered Syria as the language of the Aramean tribes sometime before 1100 B.C.E., and quickly spread throughout the Near East." For this reason, though Kutscher believes that the Aramaic influence in the postexilic period on biblical Hebrew is identifiable, he acknowledges that drawing a clear line between early and late stages of biblical Hebrew is not easy especially in poetic texts and wisdom literature. See Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, 71–73. Likewise, even though Polzin identifies the postexilic Aramaisms in biblical texts, he also admits that what Aramaisms can tell us about dating biblical texts is "minimal." See Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew*, 2.

42 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 101.

43 Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language*, 222.

text but also a poetic text, its Aramaisms are best understood as preexilic Aramaisms.⁴⁴ For Fredericks, forty-one Aramaisms out of forty-eight “alleged” Aramaisms in the book are not necessarily postexilic Aramaic (or some of them are perhaps not Aramaisms at all), and four Aramaisms out of the seven postexilic Aramaisms, which he does concede to be postexilic, have parallels in the preexilic texts.⁴⁵ But Schoors, who most comprehensively defends the Hellenistic period dating, insists that, though Fredericks accurately demonstrates that some Aramaisms are to be excluded as signs of the late date of the text because they are well attested in the preexilic epoch, there are still affirmative postexilic Aramaisms such as “later usage of nouns ending in ־וּת ; nouns of the $q^{\text{et}}\text{āl}$ type; the particle אֵלֹו ; the more frequent use of אֲשֶׁר/שׁ as a conjunction, which is a calque of Aramaic דִּי ; the high concentration of composite conjunctions, such as בְּשֵׁל אֲשֶׁר (Aram. בְּדִיל דִּי) or עַל־דְּבַרְת שׁ (Aram. עַל דְּבַרְת דִּי).⁴⁶ Moreover, for Schoors, even though each word used in Ecclesiastes is not a decisive proof of the lateness of Ecclesiastes, “when taken together with other ones [linguistic features],” the text appears to be a product of the postexilic period.⁴⁷ In other words, for Schoors, Fredericks does not see the “general picture” of the language of Ecclesiastes as he gets “too analytical.”⁴⁸ Schoors highly praises Fredericks’s thorough and careful analysis and even his thesis: the linguistic peculiarities in Ecclesiastes are not necessarily definite signs of the late date of Ecclesiastes. However, for Schoors, what is not necessarily an LBH feature is also not necessarily a feature of early biblical Hebrew. Schoors insists that Fredericks could not prove that the book is, indeed, preexilic.⁴⁹ From a Bakhtinian perspective, what Fredericks’s work rather

44 Cf. n. 39 above.

45 Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language*, 208–41.

46 Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 1:223. For Schoors’s conclusion that locates the text in the Hellenistic period, see Antoon Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth*, vol. 2, *Vocabulary*, OLA 143 (Dudley: Peeters Publishers, 2004), 499–502. For Fredericks’s discussions on the words that Schoors considers to be affirmative postexilic Aramaisms, see the following pages in Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language*: for the ־וּת ending nouns, see pp. 136–38; for $q^{\text{et}}\text{āl}$ type noun (for example, זִמְזָן), see pp. 197–98 and 213; for the particle אֵלֹו , see p. 217; the use of אֲשֶׁר/שׁ as a conjunction, see Fredericks’s claim on the “Internal Hebrew Semantic Development” in pp. 213–14; for the composite conjunctions, see p. 220.

47 Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 1:15.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 14–15. Of course, there are more scholars who tend to view the abundance of Aramaisms in Ecclesiastes strongly suggests, if does not prove, its late date of composition though there might be some preexilic Aramaisms. For example, Gordis argues that “the abundance of Aramaisms in Koheleth is precisely what we should expect in the work of a Hebrew writer of the Second Temple period, particularly a prose writer.” Gordis, *Koheleth*,

demonstrates is the traces of dialogic life of Hebrew that finally arrived somewhere in the postexilic time, probably the Hellenistic period since, as Schoors argues, the general picture of the language of Ecclesiastes—not simply the Aramaisms but also other linguistic features—is more closely identified with LBH, especially with the Hebrew of early Hellenistic period.

2.3.2 The Problems of Matres Lectionis

Regarding matres lectionis, there seems to be no question about the fact that the orthography of biblical Hebrew did not use the so-called *scriptio plena* at first; it appeared much later—probably later than 600 BCE according to Schoors.⁵⁰ Schoors's analysis shows that the frequency of *scriptio plena* in Ecclesiastes is over 50%.⁵¹ Noticing the use of matres lectionis in the Qumran biblical manuscripts, some of which demonstrates the last phase of the development of matres lectionis (over 90% in some cases), Schoors concludes that Ecclesiastes “represents a somewhat middle stage in the development of plene writing.”⁵² In other words, the orthography of Ecclesiastes, along with other linguistic features, supports the late date of the text, or the theory of the third century BCE.⁵³ However, the problem of this method is that we cannot verify that the use of plene writing had escalated by a certain rate or in a systematizable manner. The following case, in fact, testifies to the messiness of its development.

the Man and His World, 61. Crenshaw also claims that “the high percentage of Aramaisms places Ecclesiastes alongside other late canonical books (Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Song of Songs). Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 49.

50 The writing system of Hebrew had no vowel letters at the outset, but some of the consonant letters began functioning as vowels later. Schoors notes that the vocalic consonants appeared to be placed in the final position first and then in internal positions from around 600 BCE, though there is a chance that the use of vocalic consonants started being used both at the end and in the middle of the words simultaneously. How vowel letters have developed might not be entirely clear, but at least one can assume that the earliest possible time of the appearance of the internal vowel letters is after 600 BCE. See Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 1:32. Cf. Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman, *Early Hebrew Orthography: A Study of the Epigraphic Evidence*, AOS 30 (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1952), 56–57.

51 The analysis includes internal matres lectionis as well as final position letters. See Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 1:33.

52 Ibid., 32–33.

53 If the frequency of the use of vowel letters was gradually increased, one can also assume that Ecclesiastes appeared much later than 600 BCE regarding the high frequency of plene writing in Ecclesiastes. Arithmetically, the middle stage of the development of plene writing between 600 BCE and 100 CE is about 250 BCE. Of course, arithmetic approach cannot be applied to biblical Hebrew as we cannot verify how systematically the use of vowel letters was increased.

The spelling of the word “David” (either דוד or דויד), for example, may show the complexity of the development of plene writing in classical Hebrew because the spellings are often regarded as a fairly reliable factor to date biblical texts. According to Freedman, the plene spelling of “David,” that is, דויד, is a feature of LBH as attested in Chronicles, which is contrasted to Samuel and Kings, where defective spelling (דוד) is overwhelmingly used. In that corpus, the plene spelling is used only three times out of a total of 671 occurrences.⁵⁴ What is more, the late text of Chronicles is regularly dated earlier than Ecclesiastes. Although Ecclesiastes uses plene spelling in general—throughout the entire text, it reaches over 50%,—the book has the defective spelling of David in 1:1. If the plene spelling of “David” is a reliable sign of a text’s lateness, and the defective orthography is a sign of its earliness, Ecclesiastes should have had דויד instead of דוד.⁵⁵ If one dates Ecclesiastes to the third century BCE, the spellings of David in Chronicles and Ecclesiastes reveal that a newer text (Ecclesiastes) displays an older spelling practice while an older text (Chronicles) exhibits a later practice. Of course, Ecclesiastes is not older than Chronicles merely because of the defective spelling of “David” used in Ecclesiastes. The word דוד occurs only once (Eccl 1:1), and instead of דויד, the scribe of Ecclesiastes used דוד, an older spelling practice. We ought to concede that any explanation of such a spelling—e.g., an intentional archaic writing for greater authority—is conjectural. It is, at any rate, an instance of “the tiny and unsystematic alterations”⁵⁶ of human utterances for no clear reason, which complicates any systematization of the development of Hebrew language.

As indicated, the high frequency of *matres lectionis* in Ecclesiastes along with other linguistic features gives an impression that the general picture of the language of Ecclesiastes is closely identified with the Hebrew of the early Hellenistic era. However, as demonstrated above, despite the fact that the frequency of the use of *matres lectionis* is quite suggestive, it is still not decisive in dating of Ecclesiastes. The appearance of the older spelling of the word דוד in the midst of many *matres lectionis* in Ecclesiastes somewhat complicates the implications of *matres lectionis* in Ecclesiastes. Nevertheless, just one

54 David N. Freedman, “The Spelling of the Name ‘David’ in the Hebrew Bible,” *HAR* 7 (1983): 89–104. See also Andersen and Forbes, *Spelling in the Hebrew Bible: Dahood Memorial Lecture* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986), 4–5; Mark F. Rooker, “Diachronic Analysis and the Features of Late Biblical Hebrew,” *BRR* 4 (1994): 135–44.

55 According to Lester L. Grabbe, scholars view Chronicles as a product of the late fourth or early third century BCE, that is, the early Greek period, but since the contents mainly deal with the problems from the Persian period, it is also reasonable to view that significant portions of the books are from the Persian period. See Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*, vol. 1, *Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, *LSTS* 47 (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 97–99.

56 See n. 34 above.

occurrence of דִּיד is not evidence of the text's preexilic dating; rather, from a Bakhtinian perspective, it testifies to how the Hebrew had arrived to the time of Ecclesiastes through the messy and disorganized process of its dialogic life.

2.3.3 The Problems of Mishnaism

Another notable linguistic feature of Ecclesiastes that is regarded as evidence of its late date is the text's supposed Mishnaism. Gordis argues that the book's Mishnaic affinities "[stand] midway between classic biblical and mishnic [*sic*] Hebrew."⁵⁷ In addition, A. Wright, Crenshaw, and Barton acknowledge Mishnaisms of the book.⁵⁸ They all appear to concur that Ecclesiastes displays the latest phase of the development of Hebrew.⁵⁹ According to Eduard Yechezkel Kutscher, though it is uncertain how Mishnaic Hebrew (MH) emerged and developed, MH certainly was a language that had been used (either as a written or spoken language) in the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–35 CE) against the Roman Empire.⁶⁰ Kutscher assumes that MH was born out of the Roman Empire's destruction of the Jerusalem Temple caused by the First and the Second Jewish Revolts.⁶¹ These events resulted in the massacre that essentially, significantly reduced the Hebrew speaking population, thereby sparking the emergence of Mishnaic Hebrew with its own distinctive features. Due to the fact that MH is the language of the second century CE, scholars consider Mishnaisms in Ecclesiastes as a proof of the lateness of the language of Ecclesiastes.

Three prominent examples of Mishnaisms in Ecclesiastes are as follows: (1) the use of מֵה as an indefinite pronoun combined with ש as attested in Eccl 1:9; 3:15; 6:10; 7:24; 8:7; 10:14, (2) *qitlōn*-form nouns such as כְּשֶׁרוֹן ("advantage"), יִתְרוֹן ("profit"), and חֲשׁוֹבֹן (device), and (3) the use of אֲנִי ("I") instead of אֲנֹכִי ("I"). These three features are regularly discerned as Mishnaisms.⁶² However,

57 Robert Gordis, "Was Koheleth a Phoenician?: Some Observations on Methods in Research," *JBL* 74, no. 2 (1955): 103–14.

58 Addison G. Wright, "Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth)," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond Edward Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (London: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 489; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 31; Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 52.

59 Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 52.

60 The letters of Bar Kokhba attest its existence. Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, 115–16.

61 *Ibid.*, 115–17.

62 For מֵה־ש, see Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 1:59; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 67; Whitley, *Koheleth: His Language and Thought*, 11. For *qitlōn*-form nouns, see Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 1:63–64; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 108; Whitley, *Koheleth: His Language and Thought*, 7. For אֲנִי instead of אֲנֹכִי, see Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 1:47; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 71n20; Whitley, *Koheleth: His Language and Thought*, 14.

Fredericks argues that those features as well as all other Mishnaisms in Ecclesiastes linguistically are not exclusively found in MH but also well attested in classical biblical Hebrew. For example, the interrogative pronoun *מה* in the combined form of *מה-ש* is also found in Exod 32:26; 2 Sam 20:11; 1 Sam 19:3.⁶³ In the case of *qitlōn*-form nouns, Fredericks finds the same pattern nouns in classical Hebrew such as *אגמון* (“reed,” Isa 9:13), *ארמון* (“citadel,” Amos 1:4), *נקיון* (“innocence,” Gen 20:5), *פדיון* (“redemption,” Exod 21:30), *פקדון* (“reserve,” Gen 41:36), and *פתרון* (“meaning,” Gen 40:5).⁶⁴ Therefore, he argues for the antiquity of *qitlōn*-form nouns. Lastly, according to Fredericks, the exclusion of the pronoun *אנכי* in favor of *אני* is not unknown in classical biblical Hebrew. Drawing on the grammar of S. R. Driver (1882: 222ff), Fredericks argues that in biblical Hebrew, the shorter form *אני* is intentionally employed in cases where the first person pronoun appears after a verb or participle for the emphasis of the verbs’ tense, and this is how the exclusive use of *אני* in Ecclesiastes should be explained.⁶⁵

Schoors, however, contends that the following should be recognized as Mishnaisms without doubt:

In Qoh consecutive forms are extremely rare; thus the *wayyiqtol* is attested only three times (1,17; 4,1.7) [1:17; 4:1, 7], and this is generally considered as an affinity with the language of the later Biblical books and of the Mishna.⁶⁶

Schoors recognizes the low frequency (or almost lack) of “imperfect *wāw* consecutive” in Ecclesiastes as clear affinities with Mishnaic Hebrew.⁶⁷ Of course, Fredericks, nonetheless, insists that to be diagnostically significant, not just imperfect consecutive forms but both perfect and imperfect consecutive forms should be analyzed. According to Fredericks, there are sixteen perfect *wāw* consecutives in Ecclesiastes, and the high number of perfect consecutives, for Fredericks, ought to be weighed against the low number of imperfect consecutives. Such a situation does not correspond to the general picture of Mishnaic Hebrew where both the *wāw* consecutive perfect and imperfect do

63 Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language*, 104–5.

64 Ibid., 137. Fredericks misspells one of the *qitlōn*-form nouns, *ארמון*, as *אמרון* in his work.

65 Ibid., 141–46.

66 Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 1:86.

67 Schoors also believes that “the conjunction ‘before’” which is expressed by *עד אשר לא*, with a pleonastic *לא*, is “typical of Mishnaic idiom” as attested in Makkot 2:4. Schoors notes that the phrase *עד אשר לא* in the Hebrew Bible mostly means “until ... not” (2 Sam 17:13; 1 Kgs 17:17). Ibid., 145.

not occur.⁶⁸ Fredericks explains the low number of imperfect wāw consecutive in Ecclesiastes as probably an intended rhetorical feature to make the tense clear in a non-narrative type of text; it does not signal lateness.⁶⁹ However, Fredericks's conclusion that the frequent use of wāw perfect consecutive in Ecclesiastes decisively indicates the text's earlier date seems over-argued, because the low number of wāw imperfect consecutive can still be used to argue against his conclusion. It is difficult to know why Ecclesiastes scarcely uses wāw imperfect consecutives, while it uses wāw perfect consecutive frequently. It should be noted that scholars who agree with the theory of the third century BCE do not argue that Ecclesiastes fully exhibits Mishnaic Hebrew. Rather, they claim that it is situated in the later time of LBH where the use of wāw consecutive is getting decreased. What seems more problematic here is that we cannot know whether or not the use of wāw consecutive in Hebrew was decreased in a systematizable fashion. As seen in the case of the frequency of *matres lectionis* in Ecclesiastes, the decreased use of wāw consecutives in Ecclesiastes along with other linguistic features suggest that the general picture of the language of Ecclesiastes supports the third-century-BCE dating. Yet it is still true that we cannot confidently locate the language of Ecclesiastes in midway between biblical Hebrew and MH based merely on the frequency of wāw consecutives and Mishnaisms.

As far as the linguistic analysis of Ecclesiastes is concerned, we cannot be truly confident about the third-century-BCE dating of Ecclesiastes, because Ecclesiastes's language shows a dialogic relationship with the past.⁷⁰ Therefore, the possibility of the Persian period date for the composition of the book cannot be ignored. Thus, in an earlier section, I set the date of composition in the range of 500–200 BCE. As Bakhtin insists, human utterances are dialogically related to the past as those utterances emerge in response to what has already been spoken—and so is the language of Ecclesiastes.⁷¹ The utterances

68 Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language*, 62–63. Cf. Eduard Yechezkel. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll (1Q Isa^a)*, STDJ 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 41–42; Van Peursen, *The Verbal System in the Hebrew Text of Ben Sira*, 127.

69 Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language*, 62–63. See also Bo Isaksson, *Studies in the Language of Qoheleth: With Special Emphasis on the Verbal System* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987), 60–61. For Schoors, however, the text consistently lacks the imperfect wāw consecutive even in narrative parts of the book such as 9:14–15 and 2:12–15.

70 Some scholars' dating of the text to Persian or earlier epochs also points to the same direction: Isaksson (Qoheleth's linguistic distance from Mishnaic Hebrew is considerable), Fredericks (no later than exilic period), James L. Kugel (no later than the mid-fourth century, and quite possibly earlier), and Seow (the Persian period, fifth or fourth century BCE). See Isaksson, *Studies in the Language of Qoheleth*; Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language*; Kugel, "Qoheleth and Money," *CBQ* 51, no. 1 (1989): 32–49; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 11–21.

71 Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 145.

in Ecclesiastes are never “new words” that are clearly distinguished from “old words” in a chronological fashion, but rather something that has arrived from the past, already conditioned by complex utterances in particular discourses and traditions with a significant history.

3 Bakhtinian Reevaluation of the Possibility of the Third Century BCE

Despite the uncertainty of the linguistic dating of Ecclesiastes, when the full dimension of Bakhtin's notion of language is considered—understanding language not simply as an object of linguistic analysis but rather as living utterances that reflect its time and space—the early Hellenistic dating can be ultimately favored. The following Bakhtinian discussion on the dating of Ecclesiastes is perhaps not a conventional practice of dating a biblical text. My intention, however, is not to innovate traditional methods of dating biblical texts, especially Ecclesiastes. Using Bakhtin's insights about language, I rather supplement what has already been discussed by scholars.

From a Bakhtinian reader's perspective, the book's socioeconomic and literary intellectual atmosphere essentially condition its language, its living utterances. As discussed, genres are artistic ideological utterances that conceptualize realities. In fact, though linguistic analysis of Ecclesiastes has been the primary way scholars have dated the text, supporting arguments regarding the general socioeconomic and literary intellectual background of the book have also been marshaled. While such a phenomenon is a welcome direction from a Bakhtinian perspective, current Ecclesiastes scholarship, nonetheless, tends to withdraw into linguistic studies for dating the book because the historical allusions that the text makes are too vague and general, and, as a matter of fact, linguistic analysis is admittedly more objective. The vagueness of the historical allusions in Ecclesiastes is evidenced by the fact that scholars have tried to justify their views—whatever epoch they assign to Ecclesiastes, from the Persian period even to the time of Herod the great—by pointing to the alleged historical allusions in the book. For example, Heinrich Hirsch Graetz, a scholar from an earlier generation, in an effort to situate Ecclesiastes by identifying specific historical figures or events in the text, dated the book to the time of Herod, believing that the portrayal of a tyrannical king, especially in Eccl 4:13–14, is a reference to Herod in the first century CE.⁷² For Charles F. Whitley,

72 Graetz, *Kohélet Oder Der Salomonische Prediger: Übersetzt Und Kritisch Erläutert* (Leipzig: C.F. Winter'sche Verlagshandlung, 1871), 78.

the “negative attitude to Judaism and his [Qohelet’s] susceptibilities to Hellenic culture” coincide with the time of Jonathan because the Seleucid ruler’s appointment of Jonathan (i.e., 152–145 BCE) as high priest instead of a member from Zadokite house in Judea “denoted a departure from traditional Judaism and a movement in the direction of Greek practice.”⁷³ What these scholars actually revealed, however, is not only that justifying the text’s date based on the book’s contents can be too subjective, but also that it can be flatly wrong—because, as we have seen, the terminus ante quem of Ecclesiastes should be set at 200 BCE.⁷⁴ Consequently, the book’s linguistic features more than other elements became the most reliable and significant factor in dating Ecclesiastes, and the importance of the text’s ambiguous historical allusions weakened significantly. Nevertheless, Bakhtin’s insights on language insist that, because language as real utterances is used in conceptualization of its realities, the realities reflected in the utterances in Ecclesiastes should be marshaled to support the linguistic dating of the text.

If the text can be broadly situated in 500–200 BCE, a more specific time that best corresponds to the realities portrayed in Ecclesiastes is discernible. Given the time frame, what is at issue is to observe which epoch between the Persian and early Hellenistic period the utterances in Ecclesiastes fit best. As already indicated, the early Hellenistic period is ultimately favored. Since a detailed discussion of Hellenistic philosophical atmosphere will be offered later in the following chapters, I will only briefly introduce some key social aspects attested in Ecclesiastes, which point to the Hellenistic epoch. First, Qohelet’s extended use of independent rational intellect as a genuine source of wisdom and knowledge (Eccl 1:13–18; 2:1–12), which is what makes Qohelet quite unique among many biblical characters, suggests that a Hellenistic dating is more probable than a Persian dating. For Fox, “the autonomy of individual reason” in Qohelet’s wisdom is a “fundamental innovation,” which can be considered to be the influence of the principle in Hellenistic philosophy.⁷⁵ While I do not support the idea that Hellenistic philosophy is an exclusive factor that made Qohelet use his individual reason, Fox’s recognition of Hellenistic philosophical elements in Qohelet’s utterances is certainly appropriate. Second, Qohelet is also characterized as a skeptic because of his stark rejection of some significant religious doctrines, such as God’s justice

73 Even though Whitley’s work appears later than Muilenburg’s work that sets 200 BCE as terminus ante quem, Whitley is convinced that Ecclesiastes is aware of Daniel and its language is close to M. H. Whitley, *Koheleth: His Language and Thought*, 132–48. Cf. Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 58–65.

74 For terminus ante quem of Ecclesiastes, see pp. 52–55 above.

75 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 81.

and retribution (Eccl 3:19; 7:15; 8:10–12a, 14; 9:2–3a), and, of course, skepticism is one of the most prominent intellectual heritages of the Hellenistic period. Though Qohelet's skepticism differs quite significantly from the skeptical schools of Hellenistic philosophies in details, his doubts surely emerge out of the skeptical atmosphere of his world that those skeptical schools fostered.⁷⁶ In Qohelet's discourse, these significant Hellenistic cultural elements are visible.

A further special feature of Ecclesiastes that also corresponds well to the early Hellenistic philosophical atmosphere is Qohelet's consistent pursuit of individual happiness. According to Jacques Brunschwig and David Sedley, in the Hellenistic period, "the quest for happiness" took on a "new centrality," that is, "the search for personal salvation became more dominant, more insistent, more impatient."⁷⁷ What is more, an important part of the realities that Qohelet presents is the exploitation and oppression of the poor in a clearly defined bureaucratic social hierarchy (Eccl 4:1, 13; 5:7; 8:1b–9; 9:14–15; 10:4–5). Though such circumstances are broadly applicable to most complex ancient societies including the Persian epoch, together with the previous two elements, the political and economic environment depicted in Ecclesiastes corresponds well to the imperial-colonial situations in Judea under the Ptolemaic empire. In sum, the intellectual and economic aspects of the realities that Qohelet alludes to in Ecclesiastes exhibit a world that fits nicely in the Second Temple period, probably the early Hellenistic era. It does not mean that the date can be ultimately fixed to the third century BCE or to the early Hellenistic time simply because the contents of the book matches well with that time frame. The date of the composition, as a historical inquiry, still needs to be put in a broader time frame (500–200 BCE), but we can bring the Hellenistic period into service for our historical imagination as it is more plausible. Moreover, as indicated, the Persian period is still an important discursive background that provides Ecclesiastes with intellectual traditions that become voices significant for Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue. The voices that Qohelet came into contact with are the intellectual heritages of Israel accumulated over time—whether originated locally or internationally—and a broader dating, therefore, should not be regarded as a critical problem to investigate Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue.

76 Concerning Qohelet's "peculiar skepticism," Robert H. Pfeiffer aptly argues that though Qohelet was "not a student of Greek literature," his provocative ideas could not have been formed "unless he had come into contact, more or less indirectly, with Greek thought." Pfeiffer, "The Peculiar Skepticism of Ecclesiastes," *JBL* 53, no. 2 (1934): 100–9.

77 Brunschwig and Sedley, "Hellenistic Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*, ed. Sedley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 152.

A Larger Discursive Background of Qohelet's Utterances

In an attempt to overcome modernism's epistemological limitations, which recognize contradiction only as a problem to solve, I employ Bakhtin's literary, philosophical insights and try to embrace Qohelet's contradictions as they stand. As Bakhtin would insist, the contradictions in Ecclesiastes are not necessarily a sign of disunity or editorial layers that need to be sorted out to reconstruct a coherent text; those are also not to be harmonized or explained away to arrive at a certain level of conceptual, literary unity. For Bakhtinian readers, Qohelet's contradictions rather constitute unfinalizable dialogues of multiple voices. According to Bakhtin, such a contradictory consciousness is constructed by one's dialogic interactions with multiple voices or ideological consciousnesses in one's sociohistorical realities. To understand how Qohelet's contradictory consciousness could have been formed, therefore, I located Qohelet in his context in the previous chapter.

If Ecclesiastes can be safely dated to 500–200 BCE, then the next task is to offer general descriptions of the social, and especially intellectual, atmosphere in which Qohelet comes into contact with various voices. Eventually, I will narrow the range of voices down and describe the nature of a few core voices that shaped Qohelet's contradictory speeches. However, exploring into a larger discursive background of Qohelet's utterances is prerequisite for a better understanding of the complexities of those voices. In modern scholarship, Qohelet is often too simplistically viewed as an unconventional or unorthodox thinker, influenced by foreign intellectual, especially Hellenistic philosophical traditions. Or, some scholars recognize Qohelet as an orthodox or conventional one taking only some of his utterances despite his skeptical and pessimistic ideas. While both views suffer from reductionism, what is more problematic in these views is that they imagine a simple, dichotomized world of orthodoxy and unorthodoxy. The voices, dialogized in Qohelet's interior monologue, are themselves products of Qohelet's dialogic interactions with his world rather than just a few intellectual traditions, which are clearly identifiable and distinguishable. However, the view that dichotomizes Qohelet's world into two sharply opposing camps presupposes that, in the time of Ecclesiastes, there were widespread, conventional and orthodox ideas that marginalized some ideas that Qohelet utters from the mainstream of Jewish thought.

For example, as we saw, Fox and Perry regard the contradictions in Ecclesiastes as signs of conflicts between experience and religious expectations. Katharine J. Dell likewise claims that “the book of Proverbs is the starting point of the Wisdom literature,” and Job and Ecclesiastes are “the questioning traditions.”¹ For Brown, in conventional wisdom literature, ethical and religious aspects of life are emphasized, while, in Ecclesiastes, wisdom is materialistically re-characterized through the emphasis on the material benefits of wisdom, which is not conventional.² Crenshaw also argues that Qohelet is a radical skeptic; for Crenshaw, the inclusion of skeptical teachings in wisdom texts implies an “intellectual crisis in the circle of the wise.”³ For Perdue, Qohelet’s “omission of many traditional features of Jewish faith and culture” and his attempt to reorient Judaism to “a philosophical quest to determine the good in human existence” characterize Qohelet as unconventional.⁴ These scholars’ views indicate that, as Dell puts it, “there is a trend in modern scholarship to regard Ecclesiastes, along with Job, as very much on the fringes of the main wisdom exercise.”⁵ As mentioned, many scholars seem to assume that Qohelet’s unorthodox stance comes from foreign influences on him, though not all scholars view the unconventionality of Qohelet as due to foreign influences.⁶

Regardless of historical facts about foreign influences, the discussions about the unconventionality of Qohelet presuppose that the orthodox or traditional beliefs were already established in the Second Temple Judaism in the early Hellenistic age. With such an understanding, Qohelet can only be seen as a character whose identity finally emerged out of an encounter between certain unorthodox and orthodox ideas. Such a view, however, reflects

1 Katharine J. Dell, “Wisdom in the OT,” in *NIDB 5 (S-Z)* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 871–73. See also Robert Gordis, “The Social Background of Wisdom Literature,” *HUCA* 18 (1943): 77–118.

2 William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1996), 126–28.

3 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 28, 51.

4 Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 161.

5 Dell, “Ecclesiastes as Wisdom,” 302.

6 “As a man of his time, the author, who in his youth was certainly vigorous and ambitious, could hardly close his mind to the spiritual climate of the age, which brought so many new and stimulating impression with it.” Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 116. “His unique achievement lies in the skill and the sensitiveness with which he presents his world-view. He has attained to his plane of vision principally through his ancestral Hebrew culture, modified by some general contact with Greek ideas.” Gordis, *Koheleth, the Man and His World*, 58.

a typical modernist binary that pits “faithful against critical” or “orthodox against unorthodox.”⁷

In Bakhtin's sense, such a binary construction and reduction of Qohelet's contradictory words to abstract categories cannot be a true dialogue; it is, at best, what Bakhtin considers a dialectic. For Bakhtin, dialectic is to “take a dialogue and remove the voices ... remove the intonations ... carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, [and] cram everything into one abstract consciousness.”⁸ Qohelet's contradictions are not a mere juxtaposition of abstract ideas that are unable to interact each other and just simply categorized into two camps such as orthodoxy and unorthodoxy. From a Bakhtinian perspective, multiple voices constitute Qohelet's complex and contradictory voices. These voices are conversing with and interpenetrating each other, constructing Qohelet's unfinalizable identity. What is more, the world Qohelet lived in would have been much more complex than a simple binary of orthodox and unorthodox conflicts. His contradictions emerge out of that complex world rather than from simple binary distinctions. In this respect, Weeks has raised an important question, wondering whether or not Qohelet's so-called skepticism might have been “conventional” since his thoughts are not unique but actually widespread in the ancient world.⁹ Therefore, the view that Qohelet offers “unorthodox” opinions in his own context ought not to be left uncontested—whether or not such unorthodoxy is attributed to foreign influence or Qohelet's unique grappling with his own traditions. A Bakhtinian reading engages in precisely such a contestation.

Though it is clear that Ecclesiastes challenges many ethical and religious values in the Hebrew Bible, to be able to argue that Qohelet is “unconventional” and “unorthodox,” one needs evidence that the overall tenor of the Hebrew Bible actually represents the basic religious ideology of Judaism in the third century BCE. Otherwise, we cannot ignore the possibility that—because ancient Israel (like any other neighboring nations) had been a

7 Yvonne Sherwood argues that the “equation between the Modern and the rise of critique” in modern biblical scholarship resulted in a false assumption that the premodern Jews were in the “thrall of religion” and, accordingly, modern critical readers are equated with “non-religious.” But Sherwood goes on to argue that premodern Jews, whose world does not have separate categories of secularity and sacredness, were able to “express recoil and anxiety” without publicly announcing one's “un-belief.” Thus, Sherwood problematizes the binary assumptions of the modernistic biblical scholarship has had since the time of historical-critical era. See Sherwood, *Biblical Blaspheming: Trials of the Sacred for a Secular Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 368–71.

8 Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 147.

9 Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 4.

society of polytheism (indeed “poly-Yahwism”¹⁰)—many Jews in the time of Ecclesiastes were able to manage the so-called unorthodox ideas in Ecclesiastes without feeling (or being regarded universally as) blasphemous. In fact, recent research on the status of the torah tradition—which indeed will become an orthodox tradition—in the Second Temple period suggests that the torah was still in the process of achieving its authority. For example, Reinhard G. Kratz argues that the Elephantine documents evidence that Jews in Elephantine in around 400 BCE worshiped and even swore by other god(s), and this suggests that the status of the torah had not reached its highest position in all Jewish communities.¹¹ Sebastian Grätz likewise notices that the books of Ezra and Ruth freely appropriate and criticize the Torah rather than show unconditional obedience; these books demonstrate two incompatible views about foreigners based on its own Torah interpretations and appropriation.¹² Stefan Schorch argues in a similar fashion that the torah tradition was subject to emendations according to the needs of religious and political elites as late as the late second century BCE.¹³ According to Benjamin G. Wright III, even Ben Sira, who equates wisdom with the Torah, is not without disagreement with the Torah in order to advocate the sapiential tradition.¹⁴ Therefore, it cannot be assumed that Judaism in the early Hellenistic period had already established a single orthodox set of religious practices based on the Torah.

What the research introduced above suggests is that the torah tradition in the time of Ecclesiastes was not yet authoritative and was actually in the process of becoming the “Torah.” Other discourses, such as the wisdom tradition, also exercised authority. I would not argue that there was no authority in the

10 Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 82–91, especially 83. Also see Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 50–61.

11 Kratz, “Temple and Torah: Reflections of the Legal Status of the Pentateuch Between Elephantine and Qumran,” in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 84. Cf. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 1:241–43.

12 Grätz, “The Second Temple and the Legal Status of the Torah: The Hermeneutics of the Torah in the Books of Ruth and Ezra,” in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 273–87.

13 Schorch, “The Construction of Samari(t)an Identity from the Inside and from the Outside,” in *Between Cooperation and Hostility: Multiple Identities in Ancient Judaism and the Interaction with Foreign Powers*, ed. Rainer Albertz and Jakob Wöhrle, *Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements* 11 (Bristol: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 135–49.

14 B. Wright, “Torah and Sapiential Pedagogy in the Book of Ben Sira,” 157–86. See also Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 20.

torah tradition (or in the wisdom tradition) in the time of Qohelet. Neither the torah nor wisdom tradition exclusively defines the conventionality and orthodoxy in the time of Qohelet. Accordingly, what seems in Ecclesiastes to be radical and unconventional to modern eyes could have been just ideas under keen discussion for Qohelet's contemporaries rather than taboos that were offensive to the ordinary people of the early Hellenistic Judea. In order to understand who Qohelet is and what provokes the contradictions in Ecclesiastes, therefore, it is necessary to have a better understanding of a wider range of dialogic encounters—the complexities, contradictions, and struggles—that preceded the development of orthodoxy and Jewish identities.

1 Discursive Background Rather than Textual Sources

To understand the complexities of the voices that constitute Qohelet's consciousness, one must explore a broader intellectual atmosphere of his time. This task, however, is not to identify the sources of the book of Ecclesiastes. As Bakhtin would insist that the dialogic formation of human consciousness be unsystematizably messy and disorganized, Qohelet's consciousness is not to be schematized based on a few textual sources. In the past, Ecclesiastes scholarship tried to either demonstrate or disprove a kind of direct dependency between Ecclesiastes and other ancient texts to suggest that the book reveals a clear use of or dependence on the rhetoric and perspectives of other texts or vice versa.¹⁵ In fact, some scholars have been relatively successful in their demonstrating or disproving textual interdependency. Nowadays, the Epic of Gilgamesh is widely acknowledged as either a direct source of or strong influence on Ecclesiastes, at least on Eccl 9:7–9.¹⁶ The works of Rainer Braun, Martin Hengel, and others who have sought to demonstrate the relationship

15 This approach, as we just suggested, was often used to support a date for the book. But it also was a strategy to finalize Qohelet's discourse—to indicate exactly what Qohelet was trying to say by privileging one particular voice that Qohelet hears over others.

16 Loretz argues that the Gilgamesh Epic is a "precursor (Vorläufer)" of Ecclesiastes. Loretz, *Qohelet Und Der Alte Orient*, 128. Though his argument seems not well accepted when it was first published, nowadays, as Weeks puts it, "most commentators also recognize an allusion to, or even a borrowing from, Gilgamesh in [Eccl] 9." Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 141. Barton argues that [Eccl] 9:6–9 seems partly be a translation of the Epic of Gilgamesh rather than a thought influenced by Hellenistic philosophies. Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 32–43, 162–63. Fox notes that "the actual source" of the saying "the three-fold rope will not quickly snap" in Eccl 4:12 is from Gilgamesh. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 223. "Arguably the most compelling of the parallels come from the Gilgamesh Epic." Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 63–65, especially 64.

between thoughts found in Ecclesiastes and Hellenistic philosophies have also been broadly accepted as something that is possible.¹⁷ In general, however, scholars have rejected strong claims to Ecclesiastes' textual and conceptual dependency on other ancient texts, especially Greek philosophical texts. Thus, though Fox acknowledges that Qohelet is influenced by Hellenistic philosophies, he also comments that this influence should not be equated with Qohelet's "direct knowledge of Greek philosophy."¹⁸

This all is fair enough on the terms that biblical scholars influenced by modernist conceptions of texts and textual dependency think about the possible relationships between texts. For Bakhtin, however, texts might be regarded as more subtly but genuinely interrelated in dialogic terms. As Julia Kristeva famously claims in her discussion on intertextuality drawing upon Bakhtin's insights: "Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another."¹⁹ Of course, by "a mosaic of quotations" or "intertextuality" Kristeva by no means indicates that intertextuality is a kind of source study. According to Simon Dentith, the foundation of Kristeva's notion of intertextuality is Bakhtin's concept of "heteroglossia" which "radically transforms the question of sources, making them a matter not just of individual influences or borrowing, but of the socially located languages that each and every text manages in its own particular way."²⁰ Ecclesiastes is likewise interrelated to other texts, from Gilgamesh and the Hellenistic philosophies to movements indigenous to Qohelet's Jewish heritage. The scribal author(s) of Ecclesiastes who created a dialogized interior monologue in the sage character Qohelet should have been well placed socially to come into contact with intellectual traditions—not only with international traditions but also with

17 Braun, *Kohelet Und Die Frühhellenistische Popularphilosophie*, BZAW (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973); Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 115–30. In terms of Ecclesiastes' similarities in ideas and language with Hesiod and Theognis, see Harry Ranston, "Koheleth and the Early Greeks," *JTS* 24, no. 94 (1923): 160–69. For the thematic parallels between Ecclesiastes and Heraclitus, see Carl S. Knopf, "The Optimism of Koheleth," *JBL* 49, no. 2 (1930): 195–99. For the debate on the foreign (especially Greek) influence of the phrase "תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ," see Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 104–6; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 49.

18 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 6n10.

19 Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37.

20 Dentith, "Bakhtin and Contemporary Criticism," in *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 95. Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossia" is literally "varied-speechedness" and, it basically indicates the many-languedness of a particular (national) language according to different settings, groups, times, moods and many other factors. These internally diverse languages of a (national) language are nonetheless interrelated with each other in a way irreducible to a system. See Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 30.

domestic intellectual traditions to which other biblical authors were exposed. But this relationship is not best conceived as direct dependence, but rather as dialogic encounters with *voices*, both international and domestic. Of course, like Qohelet's consciousness itself, from a Bakhtinian reader's perspective, nothing is really "genuinely Hebraic" or "domestic" unless a society is completely isolated. Thus, perhaps, it is not appropriate to describe certain voices as "domestic" apart from "international," since there is no absolute boundary between the two. Thus, these are only provisional categories that I strategically use to offer my descriptions of larger contexts of Qohelet's dialogic contact.

Based on Bakhtin's dialogic principle that the human mind is constructed dialogically within a complex network of social discourses, I assume that Qohelet's experiences of or encounters with various intellectual traditions, including domestic and international, shape his speeches, whether or not there are clear textual parallels. It is not the task of this study to prove or disprove the textual or direct conceptual dependency between Ecclesiastes and other ancient texts. What is at issue is to demonstrate the voices/consciousnesses that Qohelet, as a literary character of the time frame of 500–200 BCE, might have experienced and incorporated in his mind. Ecclesiastes may well be best dated to the third century BCE, but it does not confine the voices, with which Qohelet has dialogic contact, exclusively within this epoch. For example, Siduri's voice in the Gilgamesh Epic, which originated from a distant past but in broad outlines resembles Epicurean philosophy, was clearly available to Qohelet in the third century BCE. Nevertheless, the postexilic period will become an important backdrop for all the voices available to Qohelet, and as discussed, the early Hellenistic environment is of particular importance because Qohelet's empirical, rational, and yet skeptical traits are strongly reminiscent of the intellectual culture of Hellenism.

2 International Discourses

Providing a comprehensive account of international intellectual environments of the ancient Near East, including Ptolemaic Egypt, within which at least some of Qohelet's dialogic contacts could have emerged, would require more than another research project. For this study, it will have to suffice to narrow the subject matters into the most relevant topics. As we will see, Qohelet exhibits some interesting characteristics such as individualism, hedonism, pessimism, skepticism, and, ironically, dogmatism as well. Many works in Greek, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian literature indicate that those "interesting" characteristics are not Ecclesiastes's unique features in the international context.

In other words, Qohelet seems to be a character who was engaged with the ongoing international discourses rather than an isolated lone monologist. These discourses are again best regarded as independent dialogic voices rather than, as Bakhtin says, “voiceless slaves”²¹ that the author(s) of the book utilized for certain authorial intentions. Ecclesiastes through its contradictions preserves these consciousnesses without suppressing or subordinating them to an authorial intention.

2.1 *The Ancient Near East*

Considering the geographical and historical circumstances of the composition of Ecclesiastes, the significance of Egypt and Mesopotamia, in terms of their cultural influence on the book, can hardly be negligible. According to Richard J. Clifford, biblical literature is “inevitably international” because of the relationship Israel had with neighboring nations through “trade, diplomacy, or military occupation.”²² Clifford points out that there are abundant archaeological finds that testify that “authors of Israel chose to write in types or genres that were common elsewhere.”²³ One of the examples that indicate that ancient Israel’s literary intellectual activities were a part of a larger discourse in the ancient Near Eastern world is the father-son rhetoric widely found in patriarchal didactic wisdom discourse of the ancient Near East, especially Egypt.²⁴ As Fox puts it, “most of these books [didactic wisdom books of the ancient

21 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 6.

22 Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 23. As for specific examples, in Eccl 11:1, Qohelet advises that “send your food on the water, for after many days you will find it,” and a saying from the Instruction of Ankhsheshonq uses a strikingly similar metaphor as follows: “do a good deed and throw it in the water; when it dries you will find it. See Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 3, *The Late Period* (California: University of California Press, 1980), 174.

23 Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 24.

24 Besides the rhetorical commonality, there are specific passages in Proverbs whose contents show affinities with Egyptian texts. See B. Gemser, “The Instructions of ‘Onchsheshonqy and Biblical Wisdom Literature” in *Congress Volume: Oxford 1959*, ed. George W. Anderson, VTSup 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 102–3. For the debate on Proverbs’s interdependence on the Teaching of Amenemope, see John A. Emerton, “The Teaching of Amenemope and Proverbs XXII 17–XXIV 22: Further Reflections on a Long-standing Problem,” *VT* 51, no. 4 (2001): 431–65. For an exemplary analysis of patriarchal wisdom, see Carol A. Newsom, “Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1–9,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 142–60. To preserve the androcentric aspect of the wisdom tradition, I used gender-specific language. As we will see again, this patriarchal voice or consciousness that utilizes the father-son rhetoric also partly constitutes Qohelet’s identity.

Near East] present themselves as teachings of a father to his son or sons.”²⁵ The reader of Ecclesiastes, not to mention Proverbs, is designated as a young man (בַּחֹר) according to Eccl 11:9, and is also called a son (בֶּן) in Eccl 12:12. In terms of the literary structure of Ecclesiastes, as Fox explains, the book consists of a frame narration that, by means of the words of a third person narrator, brackets the words of Qohelet.²⁶ Such a structure, according to Fox, is a genuine literary device that is also found in some ancient Near Eastern literature. According to Fox, the use of a third-person narrator to frame the main content is, in fact, a genuine literary device, which is also not unknown in ancient Near Eastern literature, including “the Instruction for Kagemeṇi,” “the Prophecy of Neferti,” “the Complaint of Ipuwer,” and “Instruction of Onchsheshonq/Anksheshonq.”²⁷ In addition, Seow also notes that the Sumerian text Instructions of Shuruppak also uses a similar kind of literary structure.²⁸ Moreover, the “royal autobiography,” “royal testament,” or “royal fiction” (Eccl 1:12–2:26) in Ecclesiastes is another notable literary form commonly found in royal inscriptions of the ancient Near East. As is well known, the opening statement Eccl 1:12 in the royal fiction is, as Y. V. Koh puts it, “a well-recognized formulaic ancient Near Eastern royal self-introduction.”²⁹ In terms of narrative strategy, as Fox finds it, Ecclesiastes particularly resembles Egyptian royal testaments, such as the Instruction of Amenemhet and Instruction of Merikare, as well as Akkadian autobiographies, such as “the Cuthean legend of Naram-Sin,” “the Adad-guppi,” and “A Sennacherib Autobiography,” also known as “The Sin of Sargon.”³⁰ According to Fox, in these texts, the teachers recount their life experiences and finally reveal what they learn from the experiences as counsel to their successors.³¹

Ecclesiastes’ formal affinities with a range of ancient Near Eastern texts are evidence that Ecclesiastes emerged out of larger literary intellectual discourses. Also, the text’s thematic and conceptual parallels with some ancient Near

25 Michael V. Fox, “Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature (Didactic),” *RC* 5, no. 1 (2011): 1–11.

26 Fox, “Frame Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet,” 83–106.

27 Ibid.

28 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 103.

29 Koh, *Royal Autobiography in the Book of Qoheleth*, BZAW 369 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 28. See also Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 119; Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature*, 103.

30 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 153–55. See also Choon-Leong Seow, “Qohelet’s Autobiography,” in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Astrid B. Beck et al. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 275–87. For Akkadian autobiographies, see Tremper Longman 111, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1991), 97–130.

31 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 154.

Eastern texts, which I will discuss shortly, also suggest that Qohelet's complex and contradictory consciousness is constructed through his incorporation of various voices that are rooted in the ancient Near Eastern intellectual discourses. Though Ecclesiastes can be recognized as an unorthodox and unconventional text compared to other biblical texts, it is not particularly unique if its larger context is considered. Qohelet's pessimistic view on human life, his skepticism of God's justice, and his *carpe diem* advice show close affinities to several Egyptian sources: the pessimistic text called "The Dispute Between a Man and His Ba"; two Egyptian tomb inscriptions, "Antef Song" or "Intef Song," which is one of the "Harpers' Songs," also known as the "Harper's Song from the Tomb of King Intef"; and, lastly, "Stela of Taimhotep."

2.1.1 The Dispute between a Man and His *Ba*³²

According to Miriam Lichtheim, the text called "The Dispute between a Man and His Ba" is regarded as a product of the Twelfth Dynasty in the Middle Kingdom of Egypt (1990–1785 BCE).³³ Not all passages are clearly understandable because of textual difficulties and the loss of the first portion of the work. Even Lichtheim is not confident about its exact contents, but according to what is clearly stated, a generally accepted plot of the text can be summarized as follows.³⁴ The man in the text appears to be a sufferer in a world, full of injustice and absurdity. Thus, he rather longs for death, but his *ba* objects to the man's desire for death and claims that death will not solve his problems. Thus, the *ba* suggests instead that he enjoy life: "Follow the feast day, forget worry!"³⁵ In response to the *ba*'s claims, the man offers four poems that describe the details of injustice and absurdity of the world that he observes. The *ba*'s last

32 According to Shannon Burkes, "Ba" is "often translated as 'soul,' though others reject this translation for the confusion it can cause when equated with the modern idea of the soul. It approximates the notion of 'personality' or 'character' and unlike the *ka* is individual to every person. While it exists during life it really comes into its own at death. The *ba* is the aspect of the person that can detach from the body after death and move about through the earth, and for this reason is usually drawn as a human-headed bird." Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies of the Late Period*, SBL Dissertation Series 170 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 144–45.

33 Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 1, *The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 163. According to Burkes, "it comes from Papyrus Berlin 3024 and dates from the Middle Kingdom, c. 2000–1800 BCE." Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies*, 157.

34 Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:163. See also Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies*, 157–59.

35 Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:165.

remark is unclear, but, according to Shannon Burkes, the ba seems to acquiesce to the man's decision.³⁶

Based on the plot summary of the text, the reader can recognize "two different world-views," as Burkes puts it.³⁷ The man is complaining about the absurdity and injustice of the world, which is supposed to be organized and maintained in the divine order called *ma'at*, and humans are required to live in accordance with *ma'at* for eternal life or avoiding punishment.³⁸ In this respect, the man shows the misconduct pervasive in his society, which perhaps implies widespread doubts about traditional belief that humans should live up to the divine order. But the man's conclusion—death—also implies that he still adheres to the traditional belief, since he expects ultimate justice to be established after his death.³⁹ By contrast, the man's ba takes a position that opposes the traditional belief about immortality and life in the hereafter. Therefore, in the ba's opinion, enjoying one's life is the best option.

2.1.2 The Antef Song

The "Antef Song" may be dated broadly to the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2135–1550 BCE) as Lichtheim believes, or to the early New Kingdom or Amarna period (ca. 1550–1305 BCE), according to Fox.⁴⁰ While its specific date cannot be determined, its terminus ante quem is set by the date of its earliest fragments, which were found in the Memphite tomb of Paatenemheb of the Amarna period (The Eighteenth Dynasty).⁴¹ The "Antef Song" is, of course, historically remote from Ecclesiastes, but what is important is not its date but the ideas that constitute a discourse or voice for Qohelet's utterances. However unique Qohelet may appear among biblical characters, he is certainly not the very first person who spoke of pessimistic, skeptical, and hedonistic ideas, as Bakhtin would insist.

36 Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies*, 159.

37 Ibid., 160.

38 For Egyptian worldview in relation to the divine order *ma'at*, see Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:4.

39 According to Burkes, the man recognizes a problem in the traditional belief in the "cosmic stability permeated by maat." In other words, the man seems to undermine the traditional teachings. However, his longing for death rather indicates that he wants to live in the hereafter where he does not have to endure all the injustice practiced by humans. In this respect, the man actually tries to adhere to the traditional belief in the afterlife in Egypt. Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies*, 160.

40 Miriam Lichtheim, "The Songs of the Harpers," *JNES* 4, no. 3 (1945): 191; Michael V. Fox, "A Study of Antef," *Orientalia* 46, no. 4 (1977): 400–3. For a chronology of Egyptian dynasties, see Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:xii–xiii.

41 Lichtheim, "The Songs of the Harpers," 191–92; Fox, "A Study of Antef," 400.

As a tomb inscription, the “Antef Song” begins with introducing the deceased as “the justified” and praises him as a happy and good prince. As mentioned, ancient Egyptians are known to have a long history of belief in the afterlife. The goods found in the royal tombs of ancient Egypt suggest that the afterlife as conceived in the traditions of ancient Egypt is not so different from this life.⁴² Death is an event, during which the deceased confront the judgment of the gods. Good and evil deeds are measured, and the one who is found to have more good deeds are rewarded (or become like gods), and the spirit (*ka*) of those whose evil deeds predominate is annihilated.⁴³ Accordingly, the traditional theme of the tomb inscriptions in ancient Egypt is usually to “praise” the life of the deceased for his or her having fulfilled the will of *ma’at*.⁴⁴ But in the “Antef Song,” this typical mortuary rhetoric makes a sudden turn in an unusual direction: a skeptical speculation on Egyptians’ long belief in their mortuary tradition and afterlife.

I have heard the words of Imhotep and Hardedef,
 Whose sayings are recited whole.
 What of their places?
 Their walls have crumbled,
 Their places are gone,
 As though they had never been!
 None comes from there,
 To tell of their state
 To tell of their needs,
 To calm our hearts,
 Until we go where they have gone!

42 According to John Baines and Peter Lacovara, the complex views on the afterlife in the ancient Egypt cannot easily be summarized. The preservation of the body, grave goods, mortuary cults and provision, the disposal of a corpse, and the reuse of old or abandoned tomb material do not suggest a unified view on death and afterlife. But they believed that there is life after this world. For more detail, see Baines and Lacovara, “Burial and the Dead in Ancient Egyptian Society,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 2, no. 1 (2002): 5–36.

43 The story of Setne and his son Si-Osire (known as Setne II) is one of the examples of the Late Period that show Egyptians’ view on the judgment of gods after death. For an English translation of the story, see Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3:138–51. For the details about mortuary practices of ancient Egypt, see Baines and Lacovara, “Burial and the Dead in Ancient Egyptian Society,” 5–36; Lynn Meskell, “Archaeologies of Life and Death,” *AJA* 103, no. 2 (1999): 181–99.

44 Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 210.

Hence rejoice in your heart!

.....

Follow your heart as long as you live!

Put myrrh on your head,

Dress in fine linen

Anoint yourself with oils fit for a god

.....

Do your things on earth as your heart commands!⁴⁵

As Lichtheim explains, Imhotep and Hardedef are “two famous sages of the Old Kingdom, who were worshiped as gods.”⁴⁶ These sages are supposed to be enjoying the good afterlife eternally in their own tombs, but the poet challenges such a belief by asking rhetorical questions about the apparently transient nature of tombs. As the text suggests, in ancient Egyptian belief, tombs provide the deceased with spaces for their eternal life. Thus, tombs are supposed to be eternal too. The poet furthers the doubt by stating that, unless we die and meet those sages, we cannot be assured of the blessed afterlife of the sages. What follows, then, is the poet's *carpe diem* advice similar to the advice offered by Siduri in the Gilgamesh Epic, whose *carpe diem* advice is, as mentioned, often considered to be a direct source of or strong influence on Ecclesiastes, at least on Eccl 9:7–9:

The tavern keeper [Siduri] said to him, to Gilgamesh:

As for you, Gilgamesh, let your stomach be full,

Always be happy, night and day.

Make every day a delight,

Night and day play and dance.

Your clothes should be clean,

Your head should be washed,

You should bathe in water....⁴⁷

Indeed, the languages of Siduri and the poet of the “Antef Song” are strikingly similar both in contents and imagery. Also, the reason why Siduri advises Gilgamesh to enjoy his life is the same as that of the poet. Both deny

45 Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:196–97.

46 Ibid., 197.

47 Benjamin R. Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation, Analogues, Criticism* (New York: Norton, 2001), 75.

the afterlife: Siduri says, “The eternal life you are seeking you shall not find.”⁴⁸ What is more, the *carpe diem* advice offered by the ba in “The Dispute between a Man and His Ba” is motivated by the same reason. Qohelet’s doubt about God’s retribution, not to mention the afterlife, and the subsequent *carpe diem* advice that Qohelet offers are, indeed, reminiscent of the words of those voices.

2.1.3 Stela of Taimhotep

The inscription from the “Stela of Taimhotep” is dated to the first century BCE. However, it also reveals an interesting development in Egyptian attitudes toward life and death: the expression of personal emotions at the loss of the beloved.⁴⁹ Though sorrow is probably a universal response to the death of the beloved, the tomb inscriptions in Egypt normally excluded such content believing that, as J. Zandee suggests, “from such a record [unfavorable utterances about death] an evil influence may emanate toward the person involved.”⁵⁰ However, some tomb inscriptions of the Late Period of ancient Egypt—from the tenth century BCE to the first century CE—provide examples of a new theme in dealing with the death of the beloved: “lament,” which is, as Lichtheim puts it, considered to be an “innovation of the Late Period.”⁵¹ In the case of the “Stela of Taimhotep,” the speaker (Taimhotep, the deceased, a wife of a high priest) both directly and indirectly expresses her grief as if she had lost her beloved husband, brothers, parents, and her children.

The west, it is a land of sleep,
Darkness weighs on the dwelling-place,
Those who are there sleep in their mummy-forms.

They wake not to see their brothers,
They see not their fathers, their mothers,
Their hearts forgot their wives, their children.

.....

48 Ibid.

49 Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3:62–63.

50 Zandee, *Death as An Enemy According to Ancient Egyptian Conceptions*, SHR 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 5. Burkes points out that skepticism is nothing unusual in Egyptian intellectual traditions, but “this was not the case with the biographies” like the stela of Taimhotep. (The biographical portion was not cited above.) Burkes goes on to claim that “this means that the appearance of such intense scepticism here of all places is new and remarkable.” See also Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies*, 206.

51 Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3:6.

As for death, "Come!" is his name,

.....

He snatches the son from his mother.⁵²

As shown above, Taimhotep in the text interestingly describes that her death "snatched" her son from her. Her own death and separation from her son are particularly vividly depicted in Taimhotep's personification of "death" and her description of "him" as one who snatches children from their mother.

Another significant characteristic of this inscription is that it describes the hereafter as "darkness." Through the mouth of Taimhotep, the inscription claims that mummies do not have life in the hereafter.⁵³ As the passage above reveals, death is compared to the status of sleep in darkness from which no one can wake. Life in the netherworld, which had previously been believed to be the same sort of life in this world, is now conceived as sleeping in complete darkness and isolation. Thus, there can no longer be any intimate relationship with parents, siblings, spouses, and children, which is also a component that provokes feelings of loss. The "Stela of Taimhotep," thus, explicitly rejects the life in the hereafter. This rejection of the afterlife is a more advanced level of skepticism, compared to the Antef Song, where the poet does not deny the afterlife but merely expresses the unknowability of the human condition after death. And, of course, like the other two examples, Taimhotep also urges her husband to enjoy his life as much as he can. For example, Taimhotep claims as follows:

O my brother, my husband,
Friend, high priest!
Weary not of drink and food,
Of drinking deep and loving!

Celebrate the holiday,
Follow your heart day and night,
Let not care into your heart,
Value the years spent on earth.⁵⁴

What is intriguing about Taimhotep is that her *carpe diem* advice appears first and her explanation for her advice—there is no afterlife—comes later. By

⁵² Ibid., 63.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 62–63.

contrast, the previous two examples express skepticism first to lay the foundation for why one should enjoy life. In the “Stela of Taimhotep,” enjoying one’s life is that urgent a matter.

Considering the date of the inscription, it can be assumed that the cultural atmosphere of the early Hellenistic era, especially skepticism, could have facilitated the appearance of the inscription, “Stela of Taimhotep.” However, I would not argue that all skeptical elements in ancient texts during the Hellenistic era are rooted in Hellenistic skepticisms. Doubting is an integral part of the human mind, and, as the previous two texts suggest, skepticism can emerge anytime, anywhere. In Bakhtin’s terms, the skepticism of the “Stela of Taimhotep” emerged in response to not only the new Hellenistic context but also earlier voices of the Near East. The general cultural atmosphere of Hellenism and the ongoing discourse of skepticism of the time should have evoked various peoples’ (latent) doubts about many local and international doctrinal beliefs and traditions. Nevertheless, pessimism and skepticism in tomb inscriptions have existed in Egypt as their own cultural heritages since the Middle Kingdom. Thus, it seems that there was likely a lively cultural dialogue between Egypt and Greece rather than mere transmission of Hellenism into Egypt. It is in this context that Judea enters the dialogue.

2.1.4 The Ancient Near Eastern Discourses and Qohelet

Clearly, Ecclesiastes is rooted in existing literary intellectual discourses of the ancient Near East. The utilization of a frame-narrative in Ecclesiastes is a literary structuring technique devised by previous authors long before the Hellenistic epoch; its father-son rhetoric was a widely used literary art of didactic material in the ancient Near East; and the “royal fiction” in Ecclesiastes is an interesting appropriation of the literary form of royal inscriptions and of a didactic narrative strategy used in what is known as the “instruction genre” in royal testaments. From a Bakhtinian reader’s perspective, these affinities that Ecclesiastes has with various forms of ancient Near Eastern literature demonstrate that the composition of Ecclesiastes is the scribal author(s)’s dialogic reply or rejoinder to the existing voices; accordingly, the Qohelet-character in Ecclesiastes is animated by the voices that the scribal author(s) injects into Qohelet.

In this respect, there are three notable ideas found in the select texts to which Qohelet’s utterances are dialogically related. First is skepticism. Of course, Qohelet is most often characterized as a skeptic, and his skepticism is not unique in the ancient Near Eastern context. The three texts just considered cast doubt on the traditional beliefs and teachings that, according to

Burkes, had lasted for “at least three millennia” in Egypt.⁵⁵ As mentioned, in “The Dispute between a Man and His Ba,” the man’s pessimism expresses his doubt about the gods’ justice in this world, and his ba’s *carpe diem* advice expresses a skeptical idea about retribution in the netherworld. The two tomb inscriptions cast doubts mainly about retribution in the netherworld, but, as mentioned, such a doubt can be extended to this world as well. Their *carpe diem* advice, which concerns itself not as much about living a life that fulfills the will of *ma’at* as traditional instructions, also implies skepticism about the gods’ maintenance of the divine order in this world.

Second is pessimism, a negative attitude towards life, which follows skepticism, the doubt about the retribution. Qohelet seeks to discover meanings in life, but he realizes that everything is absurd and vain. The consequence of his intellectual endeavors is, therefore, a dead end. Qohelet in Eccl 4:2–3, thus, claims that it is better to die than to live; what is even better is not to be born at all. As intimated, suicide can perhaps be thought of as one logical consequence of an hopeless life for Qohelet. In the case of “The Dispute between a Man and His Ba,” pessimism is distinctly vivid, while the other two only vaguely allude to it. The man in the first text longs for death without finding hope in this life because of the absurdity of this life and the injustice that fills the world. What is implicitly expressed in this man’s pessimism is that the gods do not establish justice in this world. In other words, his skeptical mind results in pessimism. Ironically, the man’s longing for death is rooted in his dogmatic belief in the retributive justice that will be established in one’s afterlife. The other two texts do not explicitly express such pessimism, but their doubt about retribution in the netherworld might be logically extended to the doubt about the gods’ maintenance of divine order in this world. If that is the case, the absurdity and injustice in this world may frustrate a righteous person and drive him or her to pessimism, just as the man in the first text.

Third, the doubt in those texts about the traditional beliefs and teachings also yields the conclusion that nothing is better than enjoying one’s life, and Qohelet, despite his pessimistic view on life, also recommends making the most of one’s time to make one’s self happy (2:24; 3:12; 8:15). In “The Dispute between a Man and His Ba,” for instance, the man longs for death, but his ba urges him to live with joy. Moreover, because the text itself does not clearly reveal its final conclusion, it seems that the work is designed to be a “dispute” that cannot be finalized—which also is an important aspect of the text in relation to the unfinalizable nature of Qohelet’s interior dialogue. Also, interestingly, in

55 Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies*, 169.

the Antef Song, the imagery used by the poet to describe a kind of happy life—following one's heart; putting myrrh on one's head; wearing good clothes—is strikingly similar to the descriptions found in Ecclesiastes, especially Eccl 9:8. While all the examples show how skepticism can logically develop into hedonism, in “Stela of Taimhotep,” the first message addressed by Taimhotep immediately after the lengthy biographical information is *carpe diem* advice, which makes the advice sound more urgent than in the other two texts. Taimhotep as a deceased one delivers an urgent message to her husband, or the ones who are still living in this world, from the perspective of the dead who have already seen that there is nothing in the netherworld.

As Bakhtin argues, after the first utterance of biblical Adam, all the rest of the utterances spoken in the human history have been emerging dialogically. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we hear other voices and speak in response to those voices. The pessimistic, skeptical, and hedonistic ideas uttered by Qohelet in Ecclesiastes are responses to the voices that had already been spoken by others of neighboring nations. In turn, those voices are rooted in the larger literary intellectual discourses of the ancient Near East.

2.2 *Hellenistic Philosophical Atmosphere*

As we just saw, Qohelet's speeches clearly exhibit literary intellectual discourses of the ancient Near East. While the significance of the neighboring nations should be recognized to understand the discursive background of Qohelet's consciousness, the influence of Hellenistic philosophy should also be noticed, since, as mentioned, Qohelet's individualistic, hedonistic, pessimistic, skeptical, and many dogmatic words fit best into the early Hellenistic epoch. However, a controversial issue in terms of the influence of Hellenistic philosophy on Ecclesiastes still concerns the possibility of the influence itself. In the following, therefore, I will briefly discuss the debates on this issue and argue that the possibility of the influence of Hellenistic philosophy should not go unnoticed. As a Bakhtinian reader, however, I once again need to emphasize that a Bakhtinian reading explores the discursive background of Qohelet to better understand the dialogic formation of Qohelet's complex consciousness rather than to prove Ecclesiastes's textual or conceptual dependency on other ancient texts. Discovering clear textual parallels is also not my task. What we need at this point is to grasp the complex network of social discourses that produced a character like Qohelet.

Many scholars in the past, assuming that the text is dated to the third century BCE, the teachings of Qohelet are a result of Hellenistic influence or literary dependency. As briefly mentioned, the works of Hengel and Braun made a significant contribution to Ecclesiastes scholarship in this regard.

Though Braun's main thesis that there exist textual and formal parallels between Greek writings and Ecclesiastes is nowadays generally rejected, he convincingly identifies rhetorical characteristics and motifs that Qohelet shares with Hellenistic popular philosophy. These include, in Braun's terms, Qohelet's empirical method (*empirischen Methode*), unprejudiced questions (*vorurteilslosen Fragen*), and individualistic-cosmopolitan self-understanding (*individualistisch-kosmopolitischen Selbstverständnis*).⁵⁶ Hengel, while rejecting a direct dependence of Ecclesiastes on Hellenistic philosophies, also describes Qohelet's wisdom in Greek terms as the "critical individuality of an acute observer and independent thinker."⁵⁷ Fox also argues that "autonomy of individual reason" is the "fundamental tenet of Greek philosophy," and Qohelet shares this characteristic as an intellectual of his time.⁵⁸

Other scholars have opposed this view, of course. Louis H. Feldman, for example, in response to Hengel's work, largely denies the Hellenistic influence on Judaism in general, arguing that what Hengel considers to be Hellenistic elements are not necessarily the result of Hellenism, but are rather genuine Jewish ideas.⁵⁹ Also for Gordis, Qohelet's "fearless use of reason in grappling with the most fundamental issues" is genuine Jewish culture.⁶⁰ Another prominent proponent of this view is Robert Harrison. Judging from the fact that Judea's geographic location hindered its development as a commercial route for the Ptolemaic empire, Harrison argues that Judea was not heavily Hellenized at the time of Ecclesiastes.⁶¹ However, despite his denial of Hellenistic influence on Ecclesiastes, he acknowledges that Judeans were exposed to the Hellenistic world as they were integrated into the empire's economic system. Therefore, Harrison argues that, on the one hand, "there is really very little archaeological support for the contention that Judea was thoroughly Hellenized before the middle of the second century BCE," but on the other hand, that "at least in economic terms, Judea was 'a little Egypt,'" which, perhaps, most heavily influenced by Hellenization.⁶²

From a Bakhtinian perspective, Harrison's argument is rather ironically a piece of evidence of Qohelet's dialogic contact with the broader Hellenistic world. Bakhtin would argue that the Greek rulers' arrival in Palestine instantly

56 Braun, *Kohelet*, 178.

57 Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 115–28, especially 116.

58 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 81.

59 Feldman, "Hengel's Judaism and Hellenism in Retrospect," *JBL* 96, no. 3 (1977): 371–82.

60 Gordis, "The Social Background of Wisdom Literature," 77–118.

61 Harrison, "Hellenization in Syria-Palestine: The Case of Judea in the Third Century BCE," *BA* 57, no. 2 (1994): 98–108.

62 *Ibid.*, 106.

created a new dialogic space between the colonized and the colonizers. As Rebecca Flemming suggests, “conquest itself is a learning process, both for the victors and the vanquished, and this feeds into the system of domination which is then established and consolidated.”⁶³ In whatever relationship the colonizers and the colonized have, they need to know each other insofar as they coexist. Unless Jews in the third century BCE were able to consciously, collectively, systematically, and fully defend against the influx of Hellenistic cultural elements into Jewish society, Jewish intellectuals’ dialogic contact with the Hellenistic cultural environment would have been unavoidable.

When considering Hellenistic culture as constituting part of Qohelet’s dialogic contacts, what is noteworthy is that Alexandria, a new Hellenistic city in Egypt, became not only the capital of the Ptolemaic empire—an international city where various groups of people lived together including Egyptians, Greeks, and Jews—but also the center of intellectual activities of Hellenistic world.⁶⁴ According to John M. G. Barclay, “the Jewish community in Alexandria became extremely large” during the period 323 BCE–117 CE.⁶⁵ What is more, Barclay also notes that “tens of thousands of Diaspora Jews flocked to Jerusalem” for major religious festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, with annual gifts and donations for the Jerusalem Temple.⁶⁶ It also noteworthy that some Alexandrian Jews were intellectual elites “whose literature became known and treasured to a far greater degree than the literary products of other Jewish centres.”⁶⁷ In other words, since it is clear that Jews in Alexandria kept in touch with Jews in the homeland, Diaspora Jews might have been important mediators of Hellenistic culture for Jews in Judea along with the Greek rulers’ dialogic influence on Judea through the process of colonization.

63 Flemming, “Empires of Knowledge: Medicine and Health in the Hellenistic World,” in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, ed. Andrew Erskine (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 449.

64 “Clearly Alexandria was just as truly a university city as Athens, and there is evidence to show that by the time of Arrian Alexandria was regarded not only as the intellectual capital of the Greek world but the foremost university city in the entire Roman empire. It is only the unsurpassed fame of Plato and Aristotle that makes it difficult for us to grasp this truth.” A. W. Argyle, “The Ancient University of Alexandria,” *The Classical Journal* 69, no. 4 (1974): 348–50, especially 349.

65 Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (California: University of California Press, 1996), 19.

66 *Ibid.*, 418–24. “The Passover is first attested in extra-biblical sources in the Elephantine documents. Perhaps most important but also intriguing is the Passover papyrus (TAD A4.1=AP 21).” Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 1:221.

67 Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 19.

Some aspects of Qohelet's discourse certainly bear a resemblance to certain aspects of Hellenistic philosophies. Nevertheless, Qohelet's words are not philosophy proper. Qohelet is not a character who is formally educated in, or directly affected by, Greek philosophies. According to Feng Youlan (or Fung Yu-lan), one of the most well-known philosophers of China, the word "philosophy" does not accurately describe the characteristics of (the so-called) philosophical literature in non-Western worlds.⁶⁸ It is also true that philosophical elements in Ecclesiastes are not entirely compatible with Hellenistic philosophical schools of thoughts, such as Pyrrhonism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism. Thus, we must once again remind that the following discussion is to see how Qohelet, as a literary character of a Jewish sage in Ptolemaic Judea, emerges in dialogic relationship with the world of philosophical discourses of the Hellenistic era rather than to precisely identify Hellenistic philosophical elements in Qohelet's words.

2.1.1 Cynicism

Before discussing the major Hellenistic philosophical schools, Cynicism, the often neglected philosophy in relation to Ecclesiastes, needs to be mentioned for our historical imagination because of its influence on all the major schools and its affinities with Ecclesiastes in certain aspects. According to *The Hellenistic Philosophers* coauthored by A. A. Long and David Sedley, the significance of Cynicism in Hellenistic philosophy is revealed in several ways: Cynicism provided the foundational education for Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, while the reclusive lifestyle of Pyrrho, the founder of skepticism, was "foreshadowed by Diogenes the Cynic;" the language and thought of another early skeptic, Timon, reflects the motto of Cynicism, the subversion of contemporary Hellenistic norms; Cynicism also affected the Epicureans concept of wisdom and their pursuit of happiness.⁶⁹

According to Sedley and Brunschwig, in their coauthored work—"Hellenistic Philosophy"—the founding figure of Cynicism, Diogenes of Sinope, who lived in the fourth century BCE, is entitled to the label "Cynic," (literally "canine,") because of his "shameless" lifestyle.⁷⁰ Hellenistic philosophy's particular

68 Youlan Feng, *Chungguk ch'ŏrhaksa (sang)* 중국 철학사(상) [A history of Chinese philosophy, vol. 1], trans. Sŏng-gyu Pak (Seoul: Kkach'igŭlpang, 1999), 3.

69 Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1, *Translations of the Principal Sources with Philosophical Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3, 6, 20, 133, 138–39, 435.

70 Brunschwig and Sedley, "Hellenistic Philosophy," 164; Dobbin, "Introduction," in *The Cynic Philosophers: From Diogenes to Julian*, ed. and trans. Dobbin (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), xi–xii.

interest is in individualistic pursuit of happiness as a goal of life, and even their ethical principles are focused on achieving happiness rather than ethical conduct itself. According to A. A. Long, by “nature,” Diogenes means the physical and mental (or rational) self, which should not be defined by cultural and geographical boundaries. For example, “property, a fine appearance, social status” and even “conventional social and moral judgments” are irrelevant and unnecessary for one’s happiness. One should be free from those external elements to live in agreement with nature—the key to being truly happy.⁷¹ Robert Dobbin notes that for the Cynics even poverty is not considered to be a misfortune but rather a natural condition of human life; it is one of the “paradoxical avenues to peace and contentment—to happiness.”⁷² Dobbin also points out that “wisdom in the sense of erudition they [Cynics] dismissed as otiose, thus making their way of life that much more abbreviated a route to virtue,” but they were still recognized as “wise men (*sophoi*).”⁷³ For the Cynics, as Dobbin notes, “life in agreement with nature” is a moral principle.⁷⁴ Long points out that such a life requires only “minimal physical requirements from the external world,” and, consequently, their lifestyle is strongly subversive to conventional social norms and resembles “primitive men and animals.”⁷⁵ Thus, as Dobbin puts it, the title, “canine” or “Cynic,” while “a sardonic barb,” is still an “eloquent” description of the Cynic’s lifestyle.⁷⁶ It is a result of extreme adherence to the principle of “life in agreement with nature.”

2.1.2 Stoicism

According to Long and Sedley, the biggest achievement of Cynicism is its formative influence on Stoicism, which Zeno founded.⁷⁷ Brunschwig and Sedley note that “Zeno’s first influence had been Cynicism, an informal philosophical movement famous for challenging and even outraging social and moral norms.”⁷⁸ Like Cynicism, as Brunschwig and Sedley point out, the basic Stoic principle of life and morality is “living in agreement with nature.”⁷⁹ For the Stoics, as Long and Sedley have it, god is “an intelligent energizing power.”⁸⁰

71 Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 110.

72 Dobbin, “Introduction,” xiv.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., xiii.

75 Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 110–11.

76 Dobbin, “Introduction,” xi.

77 Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:3.

78 Brunschwig and Sedley, “Hellenistic Philosophy,” 164.

79 Ibid., 172–73.

80 Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:278.

In other words, for Stoics, nature is a perfectly rational system designed by an intelligent god, and humans as a part of nature are meant to live in accordance with the perfect rational system.⁸¹ Stoics view “rationality” as the real nature of humanity, and “irrationality” is a status in which “impulses” overwhelm rationality and turn into irrational and uncontrollable “desire” or “passion.”⁸² In other words, by “living in agreement with nature” the Stoics strove for the eradication of passion/desire in order to become an ultimate rational being. In this respect, for Stoics, as for the Cynics, what contributes to happiness is not wealth, health, social status, or anything else that is normally regarded as valuable. What mattered for the Stoics is to become an ultimate rational being or to live in agreement with nature.

Despite the similarities between Stoicism and Cynicism, there is a subtle difference that makes the Stoic lifestyle look significantly different from that of the Cynics. According to Brunschwig and Sedley, Stoics believed that human nature strives not only for survival but also for development—in the physical, mental, and social dimensions.⁸³ Thus, the Stoic principle—living in agreement with nature—pertains in large part to moral virtue. Stoics, not only believed, like the Cynics, that humans need only minimal physical requirements from the external world for their survival to live in accordance with nature. (Long points out that, in Zeno's *Republic*, the reader can find “marked Cynic elements such as the abolition of coinage, temples, marriages and the notion that the true community must be one consisting of good and virtuous men.”⁸⁴) Stoics also believed that the development of moral virtue is an integral part of rational life, that is, life in agreement with nature. Thus, the Stoic lifestyle was far from “canine” like the lifestyle of the Cynics. As Brunschwig and Sedley have it, for Stoics, “only moral virtue—itself understood as a perfected state of the intellect—confers genuine goodness of anything,” and, therefore, “a Stoic sage on the one hand behaves very much like any conventional citizen, but on the other is driven by an utterly different set of valuations.”⁸⁵

2.1.3 Epicureanism

Epicurus established his philosophical school at Athens in 306 BCE and named it the “Garden.”⁸⁶ There are two major premises in Epicureanism: one is that the greatest good is pleasure (or freedom from pain and anxiety) and the

81 Ibid.

82 Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 175–78.

83 Brunschwig and Sedley, “Hellenistic Philosophy,” 173.

84 Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 175–78.

85 Brunschwig and Sedley, “Hellenistic Philosophy,” 174–75.

86 Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:5.

greatest evil is pain;⁸⁷ the other is a belief in the trustworthiness of sensations, a view which, as we will see, directly opposes Pyrrhonism.⁸⁸ Based on these two premises, Epicurean philosophy is concerned, like the Stoics, with physics, epistemology, and ethics.

A notable concept in Epicurean physics for this study is the notion of the imperishability of existence. Since the universe had not yet perished despite its age, yet all forms of self-evident entities can be destroyed, it was sufficient for Epicureans to believe that things, including humans and all forms of life, cannot be destroyed to nothing, and the quantity of the totality of that, which exists, remains always the same. In other words, death is the beginning of the process of the endless cycle of renewal. Therefore, the notion of death in Epicureanism is one of the steps of the endless cycle of existing totality. All objects are destroyed until they reach their smallest form and finally become an element for the renewal process of the universe.⁸⁹

The Epicurean understanding of the imperishability of the world and of the cycle of renewal led to their ethics and way of life. As Long and Sedley have it, for the Epicureans, “gods are imperishable and blessed beings.”⁹⁰ Of course, Epicureans believed that gods could never perish because no thing in the world perishes to nothing. Moreover, as “blessed beings,” gods are not involved with any part of the maintenance of the world or bothered to have any relationship with humans (i.e., intervention for justice or judgment after death). Both the world and humans have to remain as they were originally created since the world as well as humans were created according to the gods’ ancient plan.⁹¹ As Brunschwig and Sedley note, since the cycle of renewal is maintained without god or divine power, there cannot be any ultimate purpose in what happens in the world, and it is why Epicureanism is understood as anti-teleological.⁹² Therefore, without god’s absolute regulatory guidance, there is no moral responsibility for humans, and Epicureans concluded that the greatest good is only pleasure, not moral virtue as the Stoics might say.

Despite such hedonistic ideas, Epicureans were not libertines, however. The following is Epicurus’s words about pleasure:

Of all this the beginning and the greatest good is prudence. Therefore prudence is even more precious than philosophy, and it is the natural

87 Ibid., 112.

88 Ibid., 78–79.

89 Ibid., 38.

90 Ibid., 59.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid., 58. See also Brunschwig and Sedley, “Hellenistic Philosophy,” 159–60, 163.

source of all the remaining virtues: it teaches the impossibility of living pleasurably without living prudently, honorably and justly, <and the impossibility of living prudently, honorably and justly> without living pleasurably. For the virtues are naturally linked with living pleasurably, and living pleasurably is inseparable from them.⁹³

Though prudence is not the purpose of life, it is an essential means to reach the real purpose of life, that is, pleasure. But, it is true that any kind of pleasure is fundamentally good, since god does not restrict human behavior for ethical reasons. The reason that the Epicureans are not libertines is that certain types of pleasure result in greater pain than happiness.

2.1.4 Pyrrhonism

Pyrrho is known to have lived as a recluse because of his skepticism, but due to his beliefs, he did not leave any writing.⁹⁴ The writings of Timon of Phlius, a follower of Pyrrho, are, thus, the main sources we have of Pyrrho's life and thoughts. Accordingly, Pyrrhonism as a philosophical movement did not emerge during Pyrrho's lifetime or even immediately after his death; rather Aenesidemus and Sextus Empiricus revived and developed Pyrrho's thoughts in the first century BCE and the late second century CE respectively.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, there is no doubt that Pyrrho's skeptical perspectives were widely known in his own time since, as Richard Bett notes, Pyrrho "achieved considerable celebrity" in his time.⁹⁶ Moreover, from a Bakhtinian perspective, Pyrrho is not the first person who spoke of skepticism, but he speaks in response to

93 Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:114, (bracketed phrase in the original).

94 For the debate of the origin of skepticism of Pyrrho, see Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 87–88. According to Gisela Striker, the difference between Pyrrhonism and "New Academy" (or "Academic skepticism") is subtle and controversial. In this study, only Pyrrhonism will be discussed. See Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 135–49. See also Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:468–70; Harald Thorsrud, "Arcesilaus and Carneades," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58–80.

95 For more details, see Harald Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 102–46; R. J. Hankinson, "Aenesidemus and the Rebirth of Pyrrhonism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 105–19; Pierre Pellegrin, "Sextus Empiricus," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 120–41.

96 *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Pyrrho," by Bett, accessed January 4, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pyrrho/> According to Bett, Pyrrho was in a position to accompany Alexander the Great on his expedition to India before he became a philosopher of

existing skeptical utterances. As Long has it, “long before Pyrrho of course we can find philosophers expressing sceptical attitudes”—Heraclitus, Parmenides, Empedocles, and Democritus in the Presocratic period; Protagoras (the fifth century BCE) and Plato (the fourth century BCE).⁹⁷

The basic principle of Pyrrhonism is the suspension of judgment. For Pyrrho, an appearance of a perceived object through sensation cannot be what it really is because appearance does not represent its real nature. For Pyrrho, what we sense is an opinion as opposed to knowledge.⁹⁸ Thus, Pyrrho is not only suspecting the authenticity of appearances, he also suspects the falsity of appearances.⁹⁹ Moreover, his skepticism is the principle of his ethics or way of life. In other words, Pyrrhonists suspend moral judgments as well. They believe that nothing is intrinsically good or bad, but such notions are, as contemporary theorists might say, social constructions. According to Sextus, one cannot be free from anxiety if he or she believes that there is true good or evil.¹⁰⁰

What Pyrrho pursued in his real life was personal happiness obtained by *ataraxia* (“freedom from trouble or anxiety”¹⁰¹), that is, tranquility of mind. Though Pyrrho may seem antisocial due to his reclusive lifestyle and his suspension of moral judgments, it should be noted that his choice is for *ataraxia* rather than a rejection of social relation or morality itself.¹⁰² Nevertheless, Pyrrho’s skepticism seems ultimately antisocial to a certain extent. While social norms are taken for granted by most, Pyrrhonism suspends judgment on the true nature of moral behaviors themselves. It thus calls anything socially constructed into question.

For Pyrrhonists, philosophical doctrines of ethics that rely on sensations for their claimed knowledge are “dogmatic rashness,”¹⁰³ and, therefore, its

skepticism; in his hometown marketplace, his statue was raised; he was honored with the title of high priest; philosophers were exempt from city taxations in honor of Pyrrho.

97 Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 78–79.

98 Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:14–15.

99 Though Pyrrho’s philosophy is often considered to be driven by his epistemology, Bett argues that the foundation of his principle is more metaphysical than epistemological. If the epistemological perspective focuses on limitations on human sensations, the metaphysical perspective sees the indeterminacy of nature itself. For further information, see Bett, *Pyrrho, His Antecedents, and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 14–62.

100 Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*, 191.

101 *Ibid.*, 184.

102 Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:20.

103 Concerning the ethics of Pyrrhonism, Sextus claims as follows: “and so the Sceptic, seeing so great a diversity in these matters, suspends judgement as to the existence of the good or bad by nature, and exceptionless injunctions and prohibitions, and rejects this sort of *dogmatic rashness* and gets on with the ordinary business of living.” See R. J. Hankinson,

contemporary schools of thoughts, such as Stoicism and Epicureanism, can be regarded as doctrinaire. Whether or not Pyrrho himself interacted with Stoics and Epicureans, the impact of his principle of suspension of judgment is antithetical to the major two schools of thought of the Hellenistic philosophies, and his ideal provides “an alternative answer for men dissatisfied with the traditional values and beliefs of a society.”¹⁰⁴

2.1.5 Hellenistic Philosophical Discourses and Qohelet

Although Qohelet is not affiliated with any of the Hellenistic philosophical schools, some affinities between Qohelet and Hellenistic philosophers are identifiable without difficulty. For example, somewhat like the Cynics, Qohelet, to an extent, does not simplistically promote wisdom, toil, and any other “unnatural” gains that require toil because, as Qohelet repetitively claims, it is, in the end, in vain. Also, Qohelet’s doubt about God’s maintenance of the world in justice suggests Qohelet’s dialogic contact with Epicureans’ anti-teleological worldview. For both Epicureans and Qohelet, world events happen arbitrarily, and there is no divine purpose in those events. Moreover, the emphasis on the pursuit of pleasure is a prominent idea that Qohelet shares with Hellenistic philosophers, especially Epicureans. Individualism and prioritization of happiness over moral obligations are, as mentioned, the characteristics commonly found in Hellenistic philosophical schools. These characteristics formed a significant discursive background for Qohelet’s interior dialogue. However, Qohelet’s *carpe diem* advice is particularly close to Epicureans’ emphasis on happiness because a pleasure-seeking life that Epicureanism promotes is a logical result of their anti-teleological worldview. For Epicureans, humans are free from the shackles of religious obligations and moral responsibility, and happiness is the greatest good because the imperishable and blessed beings (gods) are not bothered by the toil of any kind. As mentioned, Qohelet too doubts God’s maintenance of the world in justice and denies God’s close interaction with humans. Accordingly, Qohelet, at times, prioritizes pleasure over a virtuous life, because he too seems to realize that there is no absolute moral obligation (Eccl 3:19; 7:16–17; 9:2–3a) that God requires of humans.

What is more important about the Hellenistic environment where the character Qohelet emerges are the epistemological claims of Hellenistic philosophy. The two important epistemological pillars of the intellectual culture of

“Values, Objectivity, and Dialectic; The Sceptical Attack on Ethics: Its Methods, Aims, and Success,” *Phronesis* 39, no. 1 (1994): 45–68.

104 Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 87.

the Hellenistic era are rationalism and empiricism. Rationalism takes a serious view of logical reason, and empiricism attaches great importance to the senses. Epicureans and Stoics are exemplary schools of thought that had great faith in *senses* and *logic* respectively, in the process of acquiring knowledge.¹⁰⁵ In addition to the philosophers, the development of the medical and mathematical sciences in the Hellenistic epoch, which require rationalism and empiricism at higher and specialized levels, also shows this intellectual atmosphere of Hellenistic culture.¹⁰⁶ The empirical and rational characteristics of Qohelet's wisdom are in response to such an intellectual atmosphere.

Though Qohelet is more closely identified with the sages of ancient Israel than with Hellenistic philosophers, his empirical and rational characteristics, which, as we will see, are quite clearly distinguished from the sages of Proverbs, are found in various passages in Ecclesiastes. Some aspects of Qohelet's particular rhetoric or special vocabularies point to his distinct Hellenistic (rational and empirical) orientation: terms such as “ראה” (seeing), “תור” (exploring), “נסה” (testing), and “דרש” (seeking): Eccl 1:13–14; 2:3, 13; 3:16, 22; 4:1; 5:7; 7:15, 23, 25; 27; 8:10; 9:11; 10:7. Moreover, his frequent expressions, “אמרתי אני בלבי” and “דברתי אני עם-לבי” (I spoke in/with my heart) also suggest that inner speculation and rational reasoning are valid sources of his wisdom and knowledge.

These two epistemological principles—rationalism and empiricism—are mutually complementary because of the possibility that sensory knowledge lacks, yet needs, logical affirmation; and that logical knowledge lacks, yet needs, sensory affirmation. Thus, skeptics, who cast doubt on any sensory or logical knowledge, also emerge out of such an environment, and Qohelet also seems inspired by the skeptical atmosphere of his world. Of course, as we will see, Qohelet also engages Israelite traditions. However, in Qohelet's dissatisfaction with aspects of various Jewish traditions (i.e., the torah and wisdom traditions), he frequently asks rhetorical questions that begin with “מי יודע” (who knows?) to express his doubt about God's justice, retribution, and the advantages of wisdom. Though Qohelet is not a skeptic like Pyrrho, because Qohelet mostly relies on his sensations and experiences in his pursuit of knowledge,

105 Long points out that the epistemological characteristics of Epicureanism are associated with “a strange mixture of hard-headed empiricism” and “speculative metaphysics.” Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 19. On the contrary, more rationalistic traits are found in Stoicism. Long notes that Stoics believed that “the universe is amenable to rational explanation” and they philosophized logic, physics, and ethics. *Ibid.*, 108, 118.

106 R. J. Hankinson, “Philosophy and Science,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*, ed. David Sedley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 271–99.

his doubts dialogically emerge out of the philosophical atmosphere of his world from which Pyrrho's skeptical perspectives also emerged and pervaded.

3 Domestic Environment

If international discourses form an important segment of Qohelet's dialogic contacts, so too do the "words" uttered within traditions indigenous to his Jewish context. While the literary intellectual traditions of ancient Israel do not require detailed introductory discussions like the ones that I offered in the international discourses section, we still need to observe some of their key features to recognize Qohelet's dialogic relationship with Israel's own literary intellectual traditions. Besides the wisdom tradition represented by texts like Proverbs, the emerging Torah and apocalyptic traditions in Judea are discourses that I will briefly discuss since these three traditions form a significant discursive background for Qohelet's interior dialogue.

3.1 *The Wisdom Tradition*

Scholars have grouped the books such as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, Ben Sira, and Wisdom of Solomon as wisdom texts of ancient Israel. Thus, the wisdom tradition is, perhaps, the most obvious discursive background from which Qohelet's speeches emerge. As Collins notes, however, this grouping is based mainly on the impression that these texts share something in common.¹⁰⁷ In other words, what constitutes the wisdom tradition is a question that cannot be answered definitely. The texts usually said to be wisdom books, in fact, exhibit diverse and often contradictory perspectives along with their formal varieties. This is precisely why Bakhtin and Medvedev criticize the Formalist approach to genre that relies on the analysis of linguistic and thematic units of texts to group certain texts as a genre.¹⁰⁸ While acknowledging the limitations of definitive grouping texts like Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes based on linguistic and thematic similarities, there are, nonetheless, some discernible features in the wisdom corpus that also suggest that Qohelet's wisdom discourse is, indeed, rooted in and emerges out of the "wisdom tradition."

As Brown explains, "the prominent themes of character and creation pervade much of their [wisdom books'] discourse in ways that are intended to

107 Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 1.

108 See chap. 2, pp. 37–38.

elicit wonder and, consequently, cultivate wisdom.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, for Brown, wisdom books are interrelated as they conceptualize various wise characters in accordance with their diverse understandings and wonders (or mysteries) of the divine order in creation. This “character formation” may not be a foundational or a prescriptive feature of wisdom books. However, from this perspective, we can realize that Qohelet’s discourse surely belongs to the wisdom tradition since, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, he envisages a unique “wise” character, who pursues both a pleasure-seeking life and a God-fearing virtuous life based on his complex and contradictory understandings of the divine order in creation.

Due to Qohelet’s radical ideas, such as his doubt about God’s retribution, his denial of wisdom’s positive consequences, and his promotion of a pleasure-seeking life, Ecclesiastes is vastly different from most wisdom texts. Some scholars including Crenshaw, Krüger, and Brown, however, opine that Qohelet’s polemic ideas rise in response to the “crisis” of wisdom represented by Proverbs.¹¹⁰ In other words, radical difference in ideas does not indicate Qohelet’s remoteness from the wisdom tradition, but, rather, betrays that Qohelet utterances are, indeed, rejoinders to a larger wisdom discourse of ancient Israel. Those scholars, who opt for the crisis-hypothesis, presuppose that some wisdom texts, such as Proverbs and Ben Sira, are the basis of “traditional wisdom,” since these books generally assert the divine order in the world and wisdom’s positive consequences; and, consequently, those scholars understand the emergence of the “non-traditional” texts, such as Job and Ecclesiastes, as a sign of the wisdom’s circle’s intellectual crisis. Though I do not adopt this binary logic—an emergence of an alternative out of a crisis of older wisdom—such a view, nonetheless, testifies that Ecclesiastes is deeply rooted in the wisdom tradition (and Proverbs in particular). Although this crisis-hypothesis portrays the development of ancient Israel’s wisdom discourse too monolithically, this view aptly observes Qohelet’s radical ideas as direct responses to wisdom discourses in ancient Israel, rather than as something unrelated to the wisdom tradition.

There is another trait that demonstrates Qohelet’s words are rooted in and emerges out of the wisdom tradition. The general tenor of wisdom books

109 William P. Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible’s Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 6.

110 As Crenshaw has it, “such radical views indicate an intellectual crisis in the circle of the wise,” and Krüger also similarly claims that Ecclesiastes “represents a reaction to the ‘crisis’ of older concepts of wisdom.” Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 28; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 23. Brown also notes that Ecclesiastes rises in response to socioeconomic and sapiential crisis in Ptolemaic Judea. Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 141.

including Ecclesiastes is quite universal because these texts have creation at the center of its discourse. The wisdom books typically do not deal with matters related to Israel's history, at least not in an explicit fashion regarding the covenantal and cultic traditions. In Fox's terms, wisdom texts "honestly" respond to "life's vicissitudes," or life's "uncertainties and ambiguities" through diverse forms and perspectives.¹¹¹ Fox also notes that didactic wisdom texts such as Proverbs in particular "seek to provide firm principles to guide us through life."¹¹² In other words, the scribal authors in the wisdom tradition address more general issues of life compared to other biblical texts that explicitly deal with national issues. Qohelet's discourse, likewise, deals with general issues of life as he searches for meanings of life.

3.2 *The Rise of the Torah Tradition*

The torah tradition as an emerging authoritative text of Second Temple Judaism also was a significant discursive background of Qohelet's interior dialogue. The dialogic dynamic between the wisdom tradition and the torah tradition, especially Deuteronomy, has been recognized in biblical scholarship, noticeably by Moshe Weinfeld and later, for example, by David M. Carr and Bernd U. Schipper. In general, the torah tradition is a discourse clearly distinguished from the wisdom tradition. As Weinfeld argues, however, the language and ideas in deuteronomistic writings are more closely associated with the wisdom tradition rather than the Levites.¹¹³ Carr also notes that the key terms and concepts employed in Deuteronomy indicate that the authors of Deuteronomy "would have been educated-enculturated using more traditional material," that is, gnomic material of the wisdom tradition.¹¹⁴ For Schipper, the use of the didactic language of Deuteronomy including words such as תורה (instruction) and מצוה (commandment) in Prov 1–9 shows that the redactors of Proverbs incorporated deuteronomistic language in the development of Proverbs.¹¹⁵ Such a scholarly discourse on the development of the torah

111 Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 3.

112 Ibid.

113 Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992).

114 David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 134.

115 Bernd U. Schipper, "When Wisdom Is Not Enough! The Discourse on Wisdom and Torah and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs," in *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of 'Torah' in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*, ed. Bernd U. Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 55–80.

tradition (especially Deuteronomy) and that of the wisdom tradition reveals the fact that the scribal authors of these traditions came into contact with each other.

While the importance of the Torah in the wisdom tradition is not explicitly stated until the early Hellenistic era, Ben Sira's equation of wisdom with the Torah seems to show an advanced developmental stage of a dialogic relationship between the two traditions.¹¹⁶ The passage in Sir 24:23 says, for example, "All this [what Ben Sira said about wisdom] is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob" (NRSV). Also in the prologue of the book, the translator, allegedly the grandchild of Ben Sira, indicates that Ben Sira devoted his life to the reading of the "Law." Considering the close dialogic relationship between the two traditions, Qohelet is also assumed to have heard a certain voice from the torah tradition because he is ultimately a descendant of the wisdom tradition despite his radical ideas. In fact, Charles C. Forman has argued that Gen 1–11 "represents the most important single influence in the ideas of Ecclesiastes."¹¹⁷ While Forman's claim is probably overstated, the themes in Gen 1–11, such as God's prohibition of the knowledge of good and evil, human's quest for knowledge and subsequent cursed status of human conditions, the pain of toil, and human mortality are, indeed, central to Qohelet's interior dialogue (Eccl 2:18; 3:19; 7:23–8:1a; 9:2–3).

The torah tradition as an emerging literary intellectual movement is, thus, assumed to be a part of the discursive background of Qohelet. As Christophe Nihan points out, it is generally recognized that a basic function of the torah tradition was its central role in "redefining" Jewish identity in the Second Temple period.¹¹⁸ And for Carr, writing itself in ancient Israel was, like in many other cultures of neighboring nations, for "education-enculturation," and the torah

116 According to Benjamin G. Wright III, though Ben Sira seems to be a promotor of the Torah, the sapiential tradition also appears to be equally important sources of wisdom. B. Wright, "Torah and Sapiential Pedagogy in the Book of Ben Sira," in *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of 'Torah' in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*, ed. Bernd U. Schipper and David Andrew Teeter, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 179.

117 Forman, "Kohleth's Use of Genesis," *JSS* 5, no. 3 (1960): 256–63. Cf. Katharine J. Dell, "Exploring Intertextual Links Between Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1–11," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes, *LHBOTS* 587 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 3–14.

118 Nihan, "The Torah Between Samaria and Judah: Shechem and Gerizim in Deuteronomy and Joshua," in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 188–89.

tradition became the "foundation of Second Temple Jewish education, replacing the sorts of foundational wisdom materials that had previously played this role."¹¹⁹ The torah tradition tried to establish a national and religious identity by providing Jews with myths of origins of both Israel and YHWHism, historical accounts of ancestors, and cultic regulations. As the torah tradition gains its authority and privileges to define the Second Temple Jewish identity, Qohelet comes into contact with a certain discourse of the tradition and finds his identity, not necessarily as the tradition defines but as he copes with it.

3.3 *The Rise of Apocalyptic Tradition*

Along with the wisdom and torah traditions, another discursive background that Qohelet should have come into contact with was the emerging apocalyptic tradition. Apocalypticism as a literary intellectual tradition had entailed diverse literary forms and a variety of subject matter, and its distinctive features perhaps cannot be systematically demonstrated. Nonetheless, there are notable features that scholars have recognized as apocalyptic elements, even though they may not be exclusively apocalyptic. Scholars in the Society of Biblical Literature Genre Project, thus, provide the following definition based on their systematic analyses of what has traditionally been called apocalyptic literature:

a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.¹²⁰

119 David M. Carr, "The Rise of Torah," in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 40. See also Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 141–42.

120 John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14, no. 1 (1979): 9. Cf. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 5. As discussed in the previous chapter, for Bakhtin, genre is not properly identified by its formal analysis, and, in fact, genre distinction is ultimately not possible when it develops dialogically with other genres. Defining a genre is a task of boundary making, which often involves unnecessary inclusion and inappropriate exclusion. In this respect, the definition above is better to be taken as a description of extant apocalypses rather than a prescription. In other words, it is descriptive of the texts such as 1 and 2 Enoch, Daniel, 4 Ezra, 2 and 3 Baruch, Apocalypse of Abraham, and Testament of Levi 2–5. According to Cook, "Scholars nowadays are reluctant to speak of the essence of apocalyptic literature or to make a list of necessary characteristics.... A complex set of common features and differences interconnect family

What is particularly notable in the apocalyptic tradition is its strong claim that revealed knowledge is true wisdom. This knowledge is hidden from the general public and only revealed to chosen leaders through angelic beings. These leaders appear to be only passive recipients of transcendental messages through dreams or journeys into the divine realm, and those messages are unintelligible without angelic aid, though the meanings of the messages are ultimately disclosed to the recipients.

This exclusive possession of true knowledge functions to divide the world into good and evil, and, therefore, apocalypticism is essentially a “group phenomenon” that shapes members’ social identity centering around the true wise leaders.¹²¹ Apocalypticism as a worldview envisages a world where God intervenes in the world corrupted by wicked human affairs in order to reset the cosmos in accordance with God’s justice. God in the apocalyptic tradition is frequently depicted as the ultimate terminator of human history.¹²² Those who belong to the millennial group are often regarded as good, and those who do not as evil. Many apocalyptic texts, thus, envision the final destinations of each group through eschatological judgment. In such texts, the ones who belong to the evil group will encounter God’s judgment, and the righteous will survive and live in paradise.¹²³

In terms of Qohelet’s dialogic contact with the apocalyptic tradition, we must consider that, as Collins notes, the rise and development of the apocalyptic tradition do not lie in a single literary intellectual tradition such as the prophetic tradition, which is sometimes considered to be the root of the apocalyptic tradition.¹²⁴ Gerhard von Rad argues that the wisdom tradition

members, but they are not necessary, fixed features or any ultimate essence.” Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature*, 22.

121 Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature*, 80.

122 Cf. *Ibid.*, 82.

123 Of course, ancient writers’ apocalyptic imaginations are diverse, and not all apocalyptic texts attest universal resurrection and judgment. For example, Collins notes that the concept of resurrection in Dan 12 may include “the continuation of life on earth” because the apocalyptic visions in Dan 7 and the prophecy about the “end” in Dan 9 probably imply earthly events; that is, Dan 12 “is directly concerned with political affairs, and not with cosmological speculation such as we found in parts of *1 Enoch*.” Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 98–113.

124 John J. Collins, *Seers, Sybils and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 39–41. From a Bakhtinian perspective, the apocalyptic tradition is considered to have emerged in response to literary intellectual discourses—both domestic and international—in ancient Israel. According to Collins, Akkadian prophecies and Persian apocalypticism are important backdrops of the emergence of Jewish apocalypticism, and Hellenistic cultural milieu fostered the growth of apocalyptic perspectives by providing an environment where internationally

is "the real matrix from which apocalyptic literature originates."¹²⁵ Although once largely rejected in biblical scholarship or considered to be at least overstated, von Rad's claim is now being revisited for the undeniable affinities between the two traditions. According to Collins, even though the differences between the two traditions are manifest, they cannot be seen as isolated intellectual activities for the following reasons: (1) The characters in the apocalyptic literature such as Daniel, Enoch, Ezra, and Baruch are all sages rather than prophets, (2) apocalypses or revealed knowledge is regarded as wisdom, and (3) the eschatological worldview is related to the cosmic order and mysteries found in the wisdom tradition.¹²⁶ Thus, Collins aptly points out that the possibility of the wisdom tradition's dialogic relation to the emergence of the apocalyptic tradition can be assumed. If so, we can also assume Qohelet's dialogic relation with the apocalyptic tradition. In addition, consider that the earliest portions of 1 Enoch, a Jewish apocalyptic text, is dated to the early Hellenistic period. In other words, the earliest Jewish apocalyptic text is contemporary to Ecclesiastes. According to Stephen L. Cook, "over time apocalyptic ideas and language became increasingly widespread and diffuse within early Judaism.... Thus, numerous Jews in the Second Temple period maintained a generalized apocalyptic worldview" whether they shared an apocalyptic group identity or not.¹²⁷ Qohelet's dialogic contact with apocalyptic voices is plausible.¹²⁸

In fact, some biblical scholars notice apocalyptic language and themes in Ecclesiastes. Krüger, for instance, argues that Ecclesiastes critically reflects on proto-apocalypticism (or late prophetic eschatology); that is, the text neither fully denies or ignores nor simply accepts it.¹²⁹ For Seow, the final poem in

well-known ideas were freely circulated. See also Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 25–37.

125 Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2, *The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, intro. by Walter Brueggemann, OTL (London, Oliver and Boyd, 1965; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 306. Citations refer to the Westminster edition.

126 Collins, *Seers, Sybils and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism*, 39–41, 330–38.

127 Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 81.

128 For dating of 1 Enoch, see George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 7–16. See also Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 23–37; Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *Prophets of Old and the Day of the End: Zechariah, the Book of Watchers, and Apocalyptic* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 140–44. According to Collins, J. T. Milik's work on the Qumran fragments of Enoch texts opened a new possibility that apocalypticism predates Daniel and Maccabean revolt. See Milik, ed., *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 5–7; Collins, *Seers, Sybils and Sages*, 42.

129 Thomas Krüger, "Dekonstruktion Und Rekonstruktion Prophetischer Eschatologie Im Qohelet-Buch," in *Jedes Ding Hat Seine Zeit ...: Studien Zur Israelitischen Und Altorientalischen Weisheit. Diethelm Michel Zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Anja A Diesel,

Ecclesiastes (12:1–8) is best taken as a “rhetoric of prophetic eschatology,” a kind of apocalyptic discourse.¹³⁰ The meaning of the poem has been much debated due to its highly metaphorical or symbolic language. Seow, however, argues that the poem, which is often understood as conditions of old age, in fact, describes “widespread destruction,” which is a theme that frequently appears in apocalyptic discourse.¹³¹

As these scholars’ works suggest, Qohelet had come into contact with apocalyptic discourse. While the apocalyptic tradition does not form a central part of my analysis of Qohelet’s wisdom discourse, a few observations are warranted. It is surely not a coincidence that the apocalyptic tradition claims certain chosen individuals have access to *heavenly* knowledge while Qohelet repetitively insists that all his observations are about the world *under the sun*. An important rhetoric that Enoch in 1 Enoch uses to reveal heavenly secrets obtained through his heavenly tour is the expression “I saw” (1 Enoch 39:7; 40:1, 2; 41:1, 2; 41:3, 4, 5, 7; 43:1; 2; 44:1); Qohelet also uses the rhetoric of “I saw” (ראיתי or וראה) twenty times, frequently with the expression תחת השמש (under the sun). For example, in Eccl 1:14, Qohelet says: “I saw all the works that have been done under the sun; and lo, all is absurd and a pursuit of wind” (ראיתי את-כל-המעשים שנעשו תחת השמש והנה הכל הבל ורעות רוח). Qohelet here seems to dispute with the major tenets of the apocalyptic tradition. Also, both Qohelet and the apocalyptic tradition have a particularly strong vision of justice. Qohelet’s thoroughly negative depictions of the powerful (i.e., Eccl 4:13; 10:4–5) and his ideas about “a time for every matter” (Eccl 3:1–8) and “timely judgment” (Eccl 8:5b) seem to be spoken at least partly under the dialogic influence of the apocalyptic tradition that also functions to criticize the powerful and to imagine futuristic hope in the time of suffering. However, like all

Reinhard G. Lehmann, Andreas Wagner, and Eckart Otto (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996), 107–29.

130 Choon-Leong Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” *JBL* (1999): 209–34.

131 Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” 209–34. Scholars who relate Ecclesiastes to apocalyptic literature also include: Matthew Goff, “Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality: The Book of Ecclesiastes and the Sociolect of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes, *LHBOTS* 587 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 214–25; J. Gerald Janzen, “Qohelet on Life ‘Under the Sun,’” *CBQ* 70, no. 3 (2008): 465–83; Nicholas Perrin, “Messianism in the Narrative Frame of Ecclesiastes?,” *RB* 108, no. 1 (2001): 37–60. In the following works, Qohelet is described as responding negatively to apocalyptic perspectives (including mantic wisdom). Leo G. Perdue, “Wisdom and Apocalyptic: The Case of Qoheleth,” in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition*, ed. Florentino García Martínez (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 232–58; Scott C. Jones, “Qohelet’s Courtly Wisdom: Ecclesiastes 8:1–9,” *CBQ* 68, no. 2 (2006): 211–28.

other literary intellectual traditions, both domestic and international, that Qohelet came into contact with, I do not intend to argue that their relationship is literary dependence. Rather, Qohelet's relationship with this voice is a dialogic encounter in Bakhtin's sense of dialogue that entailed both rejection of certain aspects, such as the heavenly knowledge mentioned above, and embrace of some other aspects, such as a strong vision of justice.

3.4 *Domestic Intellectual Discourses and Qohelet*

Qohelet has been recognized as an unorthodox and unconventional thinker due to his skeptical, pessimistic, and other radical statements that are not well aligned with other biblical texts. But one should not hastily imagine Qohelet as purely unorthodox and unconventional, because Qohelet's affinities with the traditions indigenous to his Jewish context do indicate that he was not in complete disagreement with the so-called "conventional" teachings of Jewish traditions. For example, in general, as Roland E. Murphy argues, "the entire book testifies to his [Qohelet's] deep roots in the wisdom tradition," and he can be understood as a sage "in the traditional sense."¹³² Qohelet acknowledges that God made all things beautiful; God made the human upright; God will bring everything into judgment; there is a time for every matter; wisdom benefits its possessors; it is better to be disciplined with wisdom than to be merely happy for the sake of a brighter future. Qohelet's beliefs in creation and the divine order, and divine mysteries were also not, of course, unique to the wisdom tradition; rather these were widely shared religious principles in the Second Temple period, especially in the torah and apocalyptic traditions.

Moreover, what needs to be noted here is that Qohelet's consent to those "conventional" ideas suggests that Qohelet, though he is presented as a rational empirical thinker, is also a Jewish wisdom character constructed by Jewish intellectual traditions that prioritize *submission* to the existing teachings of religious authorities. *Discovering new knowledge* from individual experiences and rational speculations is a significant source of wisdom for Qohelet, but Qohelet never completely abandons the "wisdom of submission." In traditional wisdom works like Proverbs, to be wise means to obey the "Father's words" more than it means to exert one's rational intellect. Likewise, in the torah and apocalyptic traditions, true wisdom is submission to the laws, or the revealed mysteries. Thus, in their stories, figures like Moses, Enoch, Daniel, and Ezra play the central role in the reception of true wisdom or God's revelations, and ordinary people are supposed to merely accept or submit to the true wisdom that the leaders receive from God. Thus, despite Qohelet's individual

¹³² Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, WBC 23A (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 72.

and rational characteristics, as we will see in the following chapters more fully, submission to authoritative religious teachings also is wisdom for Qohelet. Qohelet not just came into contact with the so-called traditional ideas, but he also incorporated them. In other words, Qohelet's wisdom is conceptually formed by Jewish religious traditions as well as rational intellect, whose home lies in the Hellenistic cultural domain.

What is more, Qohelet's affinities with Jewish traditions signify that his moral characteristics are also largely constructed within those traditions. As discussed, one of the common functions of the Jewish intellectual-religious traditions mentioned above was to serve as educational material to shape one's national and religious identity as well as moral identity. Qohelet as an intellectual "wisdom" figure appears deeply interested in moral character and shows particular interests in problems of justice according to the Jewish intellectual and religious traditions. An interesting aspect of Qohelet's morality that I would briefly mention here is his thorough and consistent criticism of the powerful or the political-religious elites. For example, in passages such as Eccl 4:13; 10:4–5; and 1:12–2:26, Qohelet describes the "king"—a symbol of the powerful both the foreign rulers and their local collaborators—as foolish, absurd, and an oppressive powerholder. Such rhetorics can be understood as symbolic expressions that the powerful are the foundation of social injustice. Such concerns are also quite common in all other biblical traditions, but, as will be demonstrated more fully in the following chapters, Qohelet's view of social, economic, and political realities are particularly sharp.¹³³ Thus, this might suggest that the apocalyptic tradition was a significant dialogic contact for Qohelet. As Cook points out, "times when two cultures come into contact and conflict may be especially ripe for apocalypticism's development."¹³⁴ Under the colonial condition, Jewish apocalyptic texts had offered criticism against the powerful—not only the foreign oppressors but also the local elites who collaborated with those oppressors—and Qohelet's persistent criticism against the powerful suggests his close contact with the apocalyptic tradition.¹³⁵

133 Perdue, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic," 256–57; Brown, *Wisdom's Wonder*, 160.

134 Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature*, 86.

135 Patrick A. Tiller, "Israel at the Mercy of Demonic Powers: An Enochic Interpretation of Postexilic Imperialism," in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*, ed. Benjamin G. Wright III and Lawrence M. Wills (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 116–17. For apocalyptic texts' characteristic of resistance to or criticism of the powerful, see also Anatheia E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011).

4 The Complexity of Qohelet's Dialogic Contact

We have explored, thus far, the intellectual discourses of Judea and its neighboring nations that produced an interesting character like Qohelet. The diversity of conversation that Qohelet participates in shows how complex the process of the formation of his consciousness should have been. However, Qohelet is often too simply considered to be a unique, unconventional, and unorthodox thinker as opposed to an orthodox and conventional one because of his skeptical and pessimistic ideas. This is an understandable presupposition since, according to Schipper's argument briefly mentioned above, the circle of the wise should have honored the emerging torah tradition, which Qohelet often seems to reject.¹³⁶ Ben Sira's promotion of the Torah as true wisdom also might suggest that Qohelet's ideas, which challenge the general teachings of the torah tradition, may seem unorthodox and unconventional. With this presupposition of the orthodox-unorthodox binary opposition, the contradictions in Ecclesiastes are often regarded as the conflict between orthodox and unorthodox thoughts. However, as discussed, Qohelet's dialogic contacts are much more diverse than that.

As we saw, both the international and domestic discourses he encounters offer a range of utterances about matters that he too will accent in his own ways, and they provoke his contradictions. Ancient Near Eastern texts, in general, spoke of wisdom through the father-son rhetoric, and some effects of such a rhetoric were to shape the identity of the "son" and to control his knowledge and behaviors. But ancient Near Eastern texts also revealed radically different ideas that appear to contradict the knowledge promoted through the father-son rhetoric or traditional teachings. Some Egyptian tomb inscriptions engaging with their own long tradition about death expressed a pessimistic view of life and uttered skepticism about the belief in the netherworld and afterlife. And they also contained hedonistic ideas. Hellenistic philosophies were preoccupied with new knowledge obtained by rational and empirical exploration, as well as the debate over what constitutes verifiable true knowledge, but a common goal of the Hellenistic philosophers was to arrive at true happiness like the traditions from which they emerged. Close to home, wisdom works like Proverbs were long concerned with character formation based on the divine order or creation as Brown has suggested, and they emphasized submission to authoritative teachings as a foundation of wisdom. The emerging torah tradition also tried to construct one's identity on the same ground,

136 Schipper argues that the redactors of Proverbs incorporated deuteronomistic language in the development of Proverbs. Schipper, "When Wisdom Is Not Enough!," 55–80.

that is, the divine order and mysteries of creation, but it provided more specific national myths and historical accounts along with cultic regulations. Finally, the apocalyptic tradition engaged not only biblical prophetic and wisdom traditions, but also a broader mantic wisdom tradition in its explorations of God's justice and developed a distinct worldview. This is the broader conversation Qohelet found himself thrust into. These are the utterances already spoken by other discourses as Qohelet strives to accent such "words" in his own way. They are what we encounter in Qohelet's contradictions as we overhear, in the text of Ecclesiastes, Qohelet's dialogized internal monologue.

The Voices in the Formation of Qohelet's Consciousness

Previously, I broadly sketched the intellectual discourses of Judea and its surrounding nations to see under what circumstances a character like Qohelet could have emerged. We saw the diversity of conversation that yielded a character like Qohelet and the resulting complexity of Qohelet's identity. Now, to comprehend the details of the process of the formation of Qohelet's consciousness, we turn to a few specific voices that make Qohelet utter contradictory ideas.

The wisdom tradition is, of course, a discourse with which Qohelet is most closely associated. As Ecclesiastes is generally recognized as a wisdom text, Qohelet's discourse can be viewed as a wisdom discourse. However, unlike Proverbs and Ben Sira in which a patriarchal, didactic authorial intention is relatively clearly promoted, Qohelet's wisdom words are complicated by another voice that confronts traditional values that Proverbs or Ben Sira upholds. Accordingly, many contradictions that Qohelet utters are related to various topics of wisdom, such as wisdom's benefits and accessibility; these are, in fact, the two most significant and fundamental topics of wisdom in Qohelet's utterances. Thus, to demonstrate how the conflicting voices construct Qohelet's complex and contradictory consciousness, I choose to deal first with Qohelet's wisdom discourse. Secondly, to further identify the voices that significantly influence the formation of Qohelet's consciousness, Qohelet's justice discourse, a subcategory of his wisdom discourse, also requires a more focused and detailed discussion. In the wisdom tradition, wisdom is inseparable from justice. The sages consider that the world was created by God's divine order, and the divine order is just. Thus, living in conformity with God's divine order is not merely a way of wisdom but also a way of justice. The wise are, therefore, the righteous in the wisdom tradition. Insofar as Qohelet's justice discourse is a significant part of his wisdom discourse, a close look at his words about justice are necessary to reveal other voices, perhaps supplementary yet significant voices in the formation of Qohelet's complex consciousness. We may not be able to exhaust all voices that Qohelet came into contact with, but if we attend to Qohelet's words closely, we can hear some of the voices and have a deeper level of understanding of Qohelet's contradictions.

1 The Voices in the Formation of Qohelet's Concept of Wisdom

The contradictory perspectives in Qohelet's utterances are, in Bakhtin's terms, conflicting *voices* or *consciousnesses*. These voices are (literary) intellectual discourses with which Qohelet had dialogic encounters. Qohelet internalizes these voices and re-creates them as he speaks. One of the two major voices in Qohelet's consciousness is a voice that characterizes Qohelet as a *sage*. This voice may be called "the Father's voice," inasmuch as it aligns well with the main speaker of patriarchal didactic wisdom discourse of the ancient Near East including Proverbs, especially its first nine chapters. This voice is not to be identified with a particular character, such as Solomon, the scribes of King Hezekiah, Agur, and King Lemuel and his mother in Proverbs. This voice is also not to be limited to the speaker of texts that are comprised of the father-to-son setting. Rather, I use the term "the Father's voice" to indicate a consciousness or an ideological discourse that produced those characters including the "father" in Proverbs. This voice made them speak to promote a certain type of teachings found in many didactic texts, especially the ethical, religious teachings and observations in Proverbs that may appear to be "traditional," "conventional," or "conservative" to modern eyes. The Father's voice, perhaps, may not precisely equate with the "traditional" wisdom as we do not know what might have constituted the traditional teachings in ancient times; nor does the Father's voice fully represent the complexity of the wisdom tradition, which is composed of various conflicting voices in dealing with the world's realities and human life experiences. Nevertheless, as long as the ethical, religious teachings and observations in didactic texts are not identified with skeptical, pessimistic, or hedonistic ideas, we still better deem the Father's voice a voice of "traditional" wisdom teachings.

In Qohelet's interior dialogue, there is another significant voice, "the voice of Rational Intellect." This voice is particularly clarion in the early Hellenistic cultural milieu and available for an intellectual elite such as Qohelet.¹ This voice characterizes Qohelet as a *rational thinker*. Like the Father's voice, Qohelet comes into contact with the voice of Rational Intellect (or rational discourses) and incorporates it as a part of his consciousness. This voice as well as the Father's voice—traditional wisdom discourse—are not just external factors that only occasionally affect Qohelet and disappear. They are constituent parts of Qohelet's consciousness because Qohelet internalizes these voices. Under the dialogic influence of each voice, Qohelet re-creates the voices in his own

¹ See pp. 122–24 below.

words. These two main voices simultaneously author Qohelet's concept of wisdom and his identity. Since these conflicting voices are independent, equally valid, and not subordinated to each other, his identity becomes unfinalizable.

I must emphasize once again that one of the potential pitfalls of "listening" to these voices, to which any Bakhtinian reader should be particularly alert, is to assume that Ecclesiastes textually and conceptually depends on other ancient texts. My task is not to detect the textual or direct conceptual *dependency*, which has been a major concern or issue of past modernist scholarship. In Will Kynes's terms, the analysis of intertextuality in the past was "source-hunting."² My Bakhtinian reading is, rather, to recognize the dialogic matrix of Qohelet's world where Qohelet's utterances in Ecclesiastes emerged. Whether or not there are textual parallels, Qohelet's dialogic encounters with various voices shaped Qohelet's speeches. Of course, the literary intellectual traditions available for Qohelet in his world are still important because these traditions are essential sources that help reveal those voices that had the dialogic influence on Qohelet. Nevertheless, what we want to discover in those traditions is not just some textual or thematic parallels but the consciousnesses behind the texts that should be the foundations of the production of those texts. Moreover, a textual dependency does not necessarily prove itself to be a characteristic of dialogue in the Bakhtinian sense. Bakhtin notes that texts easily become a "defenseless discourse" or merely "passive tool" for an author as they are transplanted into another document, which is dictated by a highly monologic authorial voice.³ Thus, this study seeks the discourses that Qohelet came into contact with rather than textual sources, and tries to reanimate them as living voices in Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue.

1.1 *The Father's Voice*

Among the many intellectual traditions that Qohelet encounters, patriarchal didactic wisdom discourse provides the strongest voice that shapes Qohelet's concept of wisdom and his identity as a sage. As mentioned, the Father's voice shapes Qohelet's understanding of wisdom, especially his positive view on wisdom's benefits and its accessibility. I mainly utilize the text of Proverbs to introduce the primary teachings of the Father's voice that constructed Qohelet's sage identity because, though there are a few minor voices, Proverbs as a

2 Kynes, "Follow Your Heart and Do Not Say It Was a Mistake: Qoheleth's Allusions to Numbers 15 and the Story of the Spies," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 17.

3 See chap 2. p. 23, n. 22.

didactic text primarily reinforces the traditional wisdom teachings, which are closely associated with the Father's voice. Moreover, Ecclesiastes's historical closeness to Proverbs supports Proverbs's dialogic influence on Ecclesiastes, since Ecclesiastes might have been a contemporary to but more probably from a generation subsequent to Proverbs.⁴ However, as discussed, what we need to recognize as "the Father's voice" is not the text of Proverbs itself but the *consciousness* that shapes "the father" character in Proverbs or, more generally, didactic wisdom discourses in ancient Israel and the Near East. The Father's voice is an ideological consciousness that made the production of didactic texts such as Proverbs possible. As a consciousness, the Father's voice itself is also an unfinalizable entity. Like Qohelet's consciousness, this voice is dialogically constructed within its own matrix of cultural discourses, especially the literary intellectual traditions of the ancient Near East, which we already reviewed in the previous chapter. The following discussion of the Father's voice, though mostly closely associated with Israelite/Judean wisdom tradition, thus, should also be understood in light of the ancient Near Eastern literary, intellectual discourses.

1.1.1 Retributive Justice and Unconditional Pursuit of Wisdom's Way

One of the teachings of the Father's voice that Qohelet most apparently resonates with is that the divine order created by God or God's wisdom is embedded in the world. Qohelet says God made everything beautiful in its time (Eccl 3:11a), and there will be an appointed time for every matter that establishes God's justice in the world (Eccl 3:17). For Qohelet, the God of Israel is the creator of the world who manages it in justice and order as the wisdom tradition, along with other biblical traditions, generally portrays. In the wisdom words of the Father's voice, especially material rewards are frequently mentioned consequences of wise actions that the divine order produces. In Prov 8:18–21, for instance, through the mouth of Woman Wisdom, the Father's voice asserts that those who seek and obtain wisdom will acquire wealth and honor as this wisdom is constitutive of the divine order. Simply put, the passage tells us that

4 According to Sandoval, the earliest possible time of the final form of Proverbs is generally considered to be the late Persian period; in Fox's view, Proverbs's composition can be as late as the early Hellenistic era. Sandoval, *The Discourse of Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs*, BibInt 77 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 41–43; Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 6. We should also remember, however, that, as Fox argues, "the notion of 'dating' a text, a traditional concern in Bible studies, is not quite germane to the book of Proverbs" because it is a collection of sayings accumulated over numerous generations. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 6.

the fruit of God's wisdom or the divine order embedded in the world is retributive justice.

The question is, then, how the Father's voice describes the way in which God's wisdom establishes justice in the world. In the Father's rhetoric of retribution, God is not the ultimate judge who passes sentence upon a person. Neither is God's justice described as a postmortem judicial process like the case of some ancient Egyptian texts in which the deceased confront gods to be either rewarded or punished according to their deeds.⁵ Recognizing such aspects of God's justice, Klaus Koch famously conceptualizes what is often regarded to be "retribution" as "act-consequence nexus."⁶ Koch argues that God's justice and the divine order is established by means of a "built-in and inherent connection between an action and its consequences."⁷ Because of the lack of judicial processes found in Egyptians' views, Koch claims that "the doctrine of retribution" is not the way justice is executed in the Hebrew Bible, especially in Proverbs.⁸ Koch, perhaps, correctly argued in that regard. Fox points out, however, that Koch's denial of the doctrine of retribution in the Hebrew Bible is "too narrow" a view, because the judicial process is not a necessary condition of retribution.⁹ We can regard the built-in consequences of acts as God's judgment as well. More importantly, such a mechanical view of retribution is quite selective of the Hebrew Bible and does not accurately explain how the sages of Proverbs describe the way in which God's wisdom results in retributive justice.

Proverbs does not always express an immediate and mechanical built-in consequence for a specific, particular action as Koch claims. The passage in Prov 11:5–6, for example, is concerned with the eventual and contrasted consequences of two opposite lifestyles that take place in an unspecified time rather than with specified wicked or righteous actions and their immediate and particular outcomes. The passage reads:

5 For example, the story of Setne and his son Si-Osire (known as Setne II) of the Late Period, see Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3:138–51. The ones who are rewarded become like gods, whereas the spirit (ka) of an evildoer is annihilated. For more details about mortuary practices of ancient Egypt, see Baines and Lacovara, "Burial and the Dead in Ancient Egyptian Society," 5–36; Meskell, "Archaeologies of Life and Death," 181–99.

6 Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?," in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James L. Crenshaw, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, 1RT 4 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 57–87. Originally published as "Gibt Es Ein Vergeltungsdogma Im Alten Testament?," *ZTK* 52, no. 1 (1955): 1–42.

7 *Ibid.*, 59.

8 *Ibid.*, 57–87.

9 Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 91–92.

(5) צדקת תמים תישר דרכו וברשעתו יפל רשע
 (6) צדקת ישרים תצילם ובהות בגדים ילכדו (Prov 11:5–6)

(5) The righteousness of the blameless keeps their ways straight; but the wicked fall by their own wickedness.

(6) The righteousness of the upright saves them, but the treacherous are taken captive by their schemes. (NRSV)

In the passage above, the sages confirm God's retribution but do not mean that the wicked will immediately fall because of a wicked action; the treacherous will be taken captive by every scheme that they devise. The passage also does not indicate that the righteous will never experience any harm. The passage's claim is a broad assertion of God's retribution rather than a declaration of the mechanical applicability of the act-consequence nexus. Lennart Boström, thus, offers an advanced interpretation of the concept of retribution. Boström designates his model as "character-consequence relationship" to suggest that Proverbs attributes a reward or punishment to "total life-style and disposition of the person" rather than to an individual's every action.¹⁰ Boström, nonetheless, points out that his concept of "character-consequence relationship" is not an "unquestionable dogma" because he notices that the sages were aware of the complexity of world events.¹¹

Despite his nuanced argument, however, Boström's concept of retribution also suffers from a problem. According to Boström, the sages of Proverbs believed that God "watches all things" and deals with people's deeds "in an appropriate way."¹² In other words, Boström understands that the sages, indeed, had faith in the ultimate justice that God will establish, though they could not fully understand God's ways since they did not observe mechanical consequences of human actions. Though not widespread or mainstream, some passages, however, do suggest that the sages of Proverbs were aware that human actions do not necessarily result in "proper" consequences.

For example, in Prov 15:16, 16:8, and 28:6, the sages reveal their observations of the realities of life in which the consequences of wisdom and righteousness do not always appear to correspond to the reward expected from the divine order.

10 Boström, *The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs*, Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990), 138.

11 Ibid., 108.

12 Ibid., 139.

טוב־מעט ביראת יהוה מאוצר רב ומהומה בו (Prov 15:16)

Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it. (NRSV)

טוב־מעט בצדקה מרב תבואות בלא משפת (Prov 16:8)

Better is a little with righteousness than large income with injustice. (NRSV)

טוב־ירש הולך בתמו מעקש דרכים והוא עשיר (Prov 28:6)

Better to be poor and walk in integrity than to be crooked in one's ways even though rich. (NRSV)

The passages above reveal that wisdom does not mechanically make one's life prosper, nor does folly make one always suffer from God's punishment. The passages, rather, imply that what happens in the world can sometimes be the exact opposite of what should happen according to the divine order. The words of the Father's voice, thus, do not consistently describe the realities of life through the rhetoric of retribution but occasionally through something like empirical observations of the real world. This voice presents the realities of the world in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. Thus, in Timothy J. Sandoval's terms, Boström's model, "character-consequence relationship," seems to be too "literalistic" about the rhetoric of retribution like Koch's "act-consequence nexus."¹³

Considering the complexity of the words of the Father's voice, what the voice ultimately tries to teach is what can be termed "wisdom ideology."¹⁴ Despite the arbitrary and sometimes absurd reality that the sages of Proverbs experienced, they, nonetheless, urge the reader to adhere to wisdom's way. The

¹³ Sandoval, *Discourse of Wealth and Poverty*, 61–70.

¹⁴ Following Terry Eagleton, I use the term, ideology, to indicate something that produces certain ideas, beliefs, and values; and that makes those items "self-evident and apparently inevitable" in society. This process eventually degrades rival ideas, beliefs, and values and legitimate social or political power of a certain group or class. See Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (New York: Verso, 1991), 1–31. As Eagleton points out, however, "the term 'ideology' has a whole range of useful meanings, not all of which are compatible with each other. To try to compress this wealth of meaning into a single comprehensive definition would thus be unhelpful even if it were possible." *Ibid.*, 1.

sages' wisdom ideology promotes the idea that wisdom itself is ultimately better than everything, including material prosperity. For the sages, wisdom's way is worth pursuing no matter the consequences. As Prov 4:11 reveals, the Father's voice teaches that "paths of uprightness" (מעגלי־ישר) is "the way of wisdom" (דרך חכמה), rather than merely a way of prosperity. This wisdom ideology is also found in Qohelet's utterances, and it means that Qohelet embraces the complexity of the Father's words of wisdom; he does not simplistically adopt the teachings about the divine order and God's justice as something mechanically working in the world.

Therefore, Qohelet sometimes speaks like a conventional sage and claims that those who fear God, the wise, can expect good things (Eccl 8:12b–13). As is well known, however, Qohelet is also capable of recognizing the aspects of life that is not consonant with the divine order. In Eccl 9:11, for example, Qohelet states, "bread is not to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the learned ones." In Eccl 7:5, nonetheless, Qohelet implicitly proclaims the superiority of a life disciplined by wisdom over a pleasure-seeking life by stating that the rebuke of the wise is better than listening to a fool's song. As Fox notices, even though scholars often view Qohelet as an unorthodox or unconventional character, Qohelet does not completely challenge the "traditional" religious view because the so-called unconventional ideas are, in fact, part of the traditional religious view.¹⁵ As we just saw, the "traditional" religious view that Proverbs displays is not that simplistic. Therefore, the contradictions in Qohelet's wisdom discourse, which are, in fact, more prominent in Ecclesiastes than a book like Proverbs, are not supposed to be viewed as conflicts between Israelite/Judean wisdom ideas and Hellenistic secular ideas. The contradictions in Qohelet's words are more explicit and apparent because of Qohelet's more active dialogic interactions with various voices. Among the voices, the Father's voice articulates how the world works not only through the rhetoric of retribution but also sometimes through observations and experiences from the world. The Father's voice, nonetheless, strives to promote the wisdom ideology, and Qohelet acknowledges it.

15 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 279. Some of the ancient Egyptian wisdom texts such as The Instruction of Ptahhotep (Maxim 22, lines 339–49) also deal with the hidden future, and the Israelite/Judean wisdom tradition had dialogic contact with the ancient Egyptian intellectual tradition. See Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:69; Michael V. Fox, "LXX Proverbs 3:28 and Ancient Egyptian Wisdom," *HAR* 8 (1984): 63–69.

1.1.2 The Subjectivity-Forming Function of the Father's Voice

What the wisdom words of the Father's voice ultimately promote is wisdom's way or a life of wisdom regardless of its consequences. However, it is undeniably true that the Father's voice often provides depictions of the world perfectly maintained by the divine order and God's justice rather than those realistic descriptions of reality attested in the above passages (Prov 15:16, 16:8, and 28:6). Such a picture of the world that the Father's voice illustrates is not always consistent with his observations, but the voice still heavily relies on the idea of retribution to promulgate wisdom's way. Then, to what rhetorical ends the Father's voice so rigorously utilizes the idea of retribution? How should we understand the discrepancy between what the Father teaches and what he, at least, sometimes observes?

As Sandoval explains, the sages' primary concern with retribution is to construct a "wisdom mythos" rather than to offer their observations of the world. In order to promote "a life of virtue," the wisdom mythos "shapes the way people 'see' things" through the rhetoric of a "wisdom-prosperity axiom."¹⁶ Internalizing the wisdom mythos, addressees of the Father's voice, like Qohelet, become able to observe virtues that the Father's voice advocates. In this process, what the wisdom mythos ultimately achieves is to construct a subject submissive specifically to the Father's voice. For those who completely embrace the wisdom mythos, no one else but the Father can endorse what virtues and vices are. Sandoval goes on to argue as follows:

As an ideological construct, the mythos produces subjects who in fact will perceive and understand their experience of reality in accordance with the ideological description presented by the mythos. Hence although a good deal of non-conforming examples might be readily noticed by those not shaped by the wisdom mythos, for those operating under the constraints of the mythos such non-conformities may not prove problematic. Rather such instances will tend to be screened out as not diagnostically significant.¹⁷

As Sandoval suggests, through the wisdom mythos, the Father's voice tries to produce a submissive subject who perceives the world as the wisdom words of the Father's voice instruct. Using a wisdom mythos that shows the contrasted destiny of the wise and the foolish, this voice urges the addressee, designated

16 Sandoval, *The Discourse of Wealth and Poverty*, 61–66. For Sandoval's argument on "a life of virtue," see *Ibid.*, 45–49.

17 *Ibid.*, 65.

as “Son,” to choose the side of “the wise,” the group to which the Father belongs. As Newsom points out, “the world is presented as a place of competing and conflicting discourses,” and “Proverbs 1–9 seeks the hegemony of its own discourse.”¹⁸ By presenting the Father’s words as the only “wisdom,” the addressee of those words has no choice but to submit to the Father’s voice to be recognized as a wise one, to avoid being considered foolish. For the “good” subject of this wisdom discourse, there is no wisdom outside the words of the Father’s voice. For example, Prov 1:8 tells us, “Hear, my child, your father’s instruction, and do not reject your mother’s teaching” (NRSV). To be wise, one must submit to “the father’s instruction” (מוסר אבִיךָ) and “the mother’s teaching” (תּוֹרַת אִמֶּךָ). Prov 2:1–5 also indicates that to understand the fear of the Lord, which is the foundation of wisdom, one should not attempt to prioritize his or her own way using one’s own intellectual capacity but need to accept the father’s words. Thus, certain words used in a context to describe characters who conform to the father’s teachings in Proverbs convey positive meanings, but the same words in a different context express negative forces. For example, the term מוֹזְמָה (discretion) in Prov 8:12 is positive quality associated with the personification of wisdom, often called Woman Wisdom. However, in Prov 24:8, מוֹזְמָה is used to describe a person who plans evil things.¹⁹ Unless one’s מוֹזְמָה is in harmony with the same religious and moral norms that the Father’s voice teaches, this intellectual quality is not wisdom but folly. We should not take this construction of a submissive subject as purely a negative project, however, because the Father’s voice ultimately wants the reader to follow wisdom’s way or a life of virtue and eventually become a father to other sons that he will instruct (Prov 4). In Prov 4:3–4 and 4:10–11, for example, the father says that he also was a son of his father, who taught him wisdom, and urges the reader (the son) to accept his words as the way of wisdom.

For some critical modern eyes, the wisdom mythos uses a language that may seem too obviously propagandistic to be acceptable as “wisdom words.” For such readers, its ability to fulfill the task of forming a submissive subject might be questionable. An individual’s decision to be submissive to what seems too manipulating is not a strange phenomenon, however. It might have been especially true if the wisdom mythos provided shared emotions and sentiments for the people of Israel to develop a sense of social membership since individuals normally have strong motivations to obtain a social membership. In this regard, Bruce Lincoln’s theory on myth provides a helpful insight. Lincoln notes that the sense of membership is never given to the individuals

18 Newsom, “Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom,” 146–47.

19 Cf. Fox, *Proverbs* 1–9, 34, and 35–36.

just because they were born into their society; they finally become members as they share the same sentiments with others within that society.²⁰ Individuals without the sense of social membership are, of course, not truly members of society. Lincoln argues that myths play a fundamental role in creating a sense of social membership for individuals, since myths, as paradigmatic and authoritative truth, provide sources of shared emotions or sentiments about select moments of history. These emotions and sentiments shared in a given society increase the level of integration among individuals.²¹ Then, since wisdom is always a communally recognized value, the wisdom mythos—the only worldview to embrace to become “wise” for the people of Israel—can be a paradigmatic and authoritative truth about which they shared the same emotions and sentiments. Consequently, an individual, who chooses to embrace the wisdom mythos that the Father’s voice creates, does not merely choose to be wise personally. He or she is embracing the sense of social membership, or becoming a “wise citizen” of Israel, so to speak.

As mentioned, the dualistic vision portrayed by the wisdom mythos divides the world into “wise and righteous we” and “foolish and wicked others.” The only option that an individual can choose is to accept the wisdom mythos and become a communally recognized “wise one”—a valued member of society, who shares the same emotions and sentiments about the wisdom mythos of the Father’s voice. To legitimately share a sense of social identity, individuals should be submissive to nothing else but the teachings of the Father so that they can assure themselves of their possession of wisdom through this delineation of group membership. If we assume that the people of ancient Israel considered the wisdom mythos as authoritative and paradigmatic truth, then this mythos should have become a source of shared emotions or sentiments for individuals in ancient Israelite society, and increased the sense of integration among the social members.

The wisdom mythos is admittedly not a “myth” per se as it is not a historical account, however. Then, we need to verify how this “wisdom membership” endows individuals with the sense of integration shared by the entire Israelite/Judean community, not just wisdom circle, to function as social membership. The Father’s voice, by using the national deity YHWH in the production of wisdom mythos, invokes the national historical narratives/discourses found in some portions of the torah, especially Deuteronomy, and prophetic traditions that, indeed, function as myth. In the wisdom mythos,

20 Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 23.

21 Ibid., 21–26.

prosperity and destitution depend on people's obedience to the will of YHWH as is in the biblical historical accounts. For example, Prov 10:3 tells us that, YHWH will not let the righteous starve, but YHWH will push the wicked away (לֹא־יָרֵעִיב יְהוָה נֶפֶשׁ צָדִיק וְהוֹת רָשָׁעִים יִהְיֶה). According to Prov 16:7, YHWH can even make one's enemies be at peace with him or her when one's ways please YHWH (בְּרָצוֹת יְהוָה דְּרָכֵי־אִישׁ גַּם־אֹיְבָיו יִשְׁלָם אֹתוֹ). Similarly, Prov 21:31 claims that humans can prepare for a battle, but the salvation belongs to YHWH (סוֹס מוֹכֵן לְיוֹם מִלְחָמָה וְלִיהוָה הַתְּשׁוּעָה). Notice that the world events that the wisdom mythos portrays are exactly what the national historical discourses envision. According to Deut 1, the people of Israel disobeyed God's command to take the hill country of the Amorites without fear and sent spies to the land, their hearts were terrified, and they grumbled, "YHWH hates us." The consequence was devastating. YHWH allowed none of the older generation, except for Caleb and Joshua, to enter the land. Also, Josh 6 famously reports that when Joshua and the people of Israel did as YHWH commanded, the wall of the city of Jericho fell down flat as YHWH promised.

The world depicted in the wisdom mythos may only theoretically be the same world that the national historical discourses generate. However, the connection that the wisdom mythos makes with the historical narratives is beyond such an abstract level. The language used in some passages in Proverbs, which reminds readers of the torah tradition, suggests that the world of the wisdom mythos is inherently connected to the national historical discourses. As Schipper points out, the תּוֹרָה and מִצְוָה of the father in Prov 3:1 are not merely parental instructions; they are ultimately "the will of YHWH," which is tied to the law of Moses.²² Moreover, as Deut 4:6 indicates, the Torah is Israel's wisdom and a source of national pride. This connection between wisdom and the Torah also suggests that "wisdom" plays a significant role in the formation of social identity for all people of Israel. What is more, a dialogic relationship between the wisdom and the torah traditions is, in fact, apparent in several passages in Proverbs and Deut 6:8–9. As Schipper demonstrates, the "father" in Prov 3:3b commands to "bind" (קָשַׁר) the תּוֹרָה and מִצְוָה upon the neck and "write" (כָּתַב) them in the tablet of the heart; the passage in Deut 6:8–9 also uses the same words, "to bind" and "to write," to command the people of Israel to remember God's will.²³ Of course, when it comes to the time of Ben Sira, a close dialogic relationship between the two traditions are even more evident (Sir 24:23, 25–29). The wisdom tradition was, thus, at least not in as strong tension with the torah tradition as some scholars argue. With the help of the

22 Schipper, "When Wisdom Is Not Enough!," 59–60.

23 Ibid.

mythic historical accounts of ancient Israel, the wisdom mythos becomes a source of shared emotions or sentiments integral to the sense of the social membership. But the wisdom mythos's dualistic vision in a text like Proverbs increases the importance of submission to the Father's voice, which represents the will of God, in its shaping of the social membership.

1.1.3 The Call of the Father's Voice

One of the ways in which the wisdom mythos' rhetorical features construct a subject submissive to the Father's voice is its use of repeated calling to heed the wisdom words of the Father's voice. Though common in ancient Near Eastern didactic texts, this rhetorical device is notable, because the Father's voice earns the reader's attention by calling the reader "my son" (בני), and urges the reader to submit to the Father's voice. Examples are abundant especially in Prov 1–9.

(Prov 1:8)....שמע בני מוסר אביך

Hear, my son, your father's discipline....

(Prov 3:1)....בני תורתי אל-תשכח

My son, do not forget my teaching....

(Prov 4:1)....שמעו בנים מוסר אב

Hear, sons, the father's discipline....

(Prov 4:10)....שמע בני וקח אמרי

My son, hear and take my words....

(Prov 5:1)....בני לחכמתי הקשיבה

My son, listen attentively to my wisdom....

(Prov 7:24)....ועתה בנים שמעו-לי

Now, sons, hear me....

The Father's calling itself may not precisely be part of the content of the teachings or part of the wisdom mythos, so its significance can easily be overlooked.

However, Newsom addresses the rich implications of the father-son rhetoric in terms of the subjectivity-formation function of the Father's calling. Drawing on Emile Benveniste, Newsom argues as follows:

"I" and "you" are linguistic blanks or empty signs filled only when individual speakers and addressees appropriate them in specific instances of discourse.... The striking prominence of the pronouns "I" and "you" and the repeated use of vocative and imperative address in Proverbs 1–9 are clear indicator of what is at stake in these chapters: the formation of the subjectivity of the reader.²⁴

Though monologic in its contents, the literary technique used here is father-son (I-you) dialogue, where "the Father" occupies the position of "I" and invites the readers to appropriate the pronoun "you" to form their subjectivity as "the Son." In this dialogic rhetoric, the reader is not a detached third person who merely eavesdrops on the lessons of this "Father" to his "Son." As the reader adopts the subject position of "you," he or she becomes "the Son," the direct addressee of "the Father." The wisdom mythos that the "Father" creates becomes a paradigmatic truth, or "symbolic framework"²⁵ in Sandoval's terms, that can control the perspective of the "Son" or affect his observations. Of course, the level of the reader's conformity to the "Father" can vary as the reader can respond to the Father's call in various ways. In the case of Qohelet, which I will discuss later, the lack of empirical verifiability of the rhetoric of the wisdom-prosperity axiom in the wisdom mythos is an issue that prevents Qohelet from fully submitting to the Father's voice. Therefore, he often deviates from the path of the wise that the Father's voice sets. Nevertheless, Qohelet also demonstrates the typical traits of a wise person. He is in part—though never completely—the sort of subject that the Father's voice tries to construct through the father-son rhetoric.

1.2 *The Voice of Rational Intellect*

So far, I have discussed the Father's voice's main teachings and explained how an individual, like Qohelet, might develop typical sage characteristics found in a patriarchal didactic wisdom discourse. Modern scholars, however, recognize Qohelet often as an unconventional and unorthodox character rather than a traditional and orthodox one. According to Seow, due to the book's heretical ideas, the canonicity of Ecclesiastes was in dispute from the Council of Jamnia

²⁴ Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 143.

²⁵ Sandoval, *Discourse of Wealth and Poverty*, 66.

(ca. 100 CE) until the end of the fourth century CE.²⁶ Elias Bickerman even included Ecclesiastes in his book called *Four Strange Books of the Bible*.²⁷ As I already disputed in the previous chapter, Qohelet's world is not simply dichotomized into orthodox and unorthodox camps. These "heretic" and "strange" characteristics of Qohelet, which scholars recognize, nonetheless, suggest that there certainly is another voice, a unique one, that contradicts the Father's voice in Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue.

For Qohelet, his independent reason is also another kind of wisdom as valid as the Father's voice. This concept of wisdom may be termed "rational intellect" following Fox's analysis of the word חכמה (wisdom) in Qohelet's utterances.²⁸ According to Fox, Qohelet's wisdom as rational intellect is intellectual power for an "open-ended search for new knowledge (1:13, 18; 7:23; 8:16)."²⁹ The "wise" life's prerequisite in patriarchal didactic wisdom discourse is one's absolute submission to the Father's voice. But Qohelet sometimes prioritizes his independent intellectual capacity over the Father's voice. Indeed, this kind of concept of wisdom that Qohelet embraces and deploys for his self-interest is unique in the wisdom corpus, because, as Fox points out, "outside

26 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 3–4. According to Christianson, though it is true that ancient readers also have questioned the canonicity of the book, they were less "bothered" by the question "why is Ecclesiastes in the canon." Instead, ancient readers were more serious about "why Solomon?" that is, why Solomon wrote "such vehement denunciation on the vanity of riches, wealth and even human existence." Christianson believes that canonicity is much more a serious matter for the modern reader than the ancient reader. See Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 91.

27 Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible: Jonah, Daniel, Koheleth, Esther* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967).

28 Fox offers three categories of Qohelet's concepts of חכמה: "ingenuity, good sense, and rational intellect." Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 73. In Ecclesiastes, חכמה and חכם/חכמים are, of course, the primary terms to indicate wisdom as in Proverbs, but some other words also appear, such as דעת (knowledge), ידעים (learned ones), and נבנים (or נבונים, ones who have understanding). Throughout Ecclesiastes, חכמה appears twenty-eight times, חכם as an adjective appears twenty-one times, and חכם as a verb, four times. The terms ידעים and נבנים occur only once in 9:11, and they are synonymous with "the wise" in Ecclesiastes. The word דעת as a noun appears seven times, never independently but always with חכמה. Ecclesiastes does not provide specific contexts to distinguish דעת from חכמה. It seems that דעת is often a synonym of חכמה.

29 It seems that 1:18 among Fox's select passages is mistakenly noted for 1:17. While 1:18 is not relevant to the topic "open-ended search for new knowledge," the passage in 1:17 is. The passage, 1:17, begins with the clause "I set my heart," which Qohelet uses for his initiation of independent investigation of "new truth." Ibid., 74. Also note that this third concept is most important for this study in terms of Qohelet's uniqueness in the Hebrew Bible. See also Ibid., 75–77.

Qohelet, wisdom ... is never an instrument in open-ended exploration.”³⁰ In other words, Qohelet alone in biblical traditions considers personal observations and experiences as valid sources of knowledge. The reader cannot but understand him as a “strange” one among the wise.

Many scholars, however, view Fox’s notion of rational intellect in Ecclesiastes as a basic aspect of wisdom commonly found in the wisdom tradition because they assume that the wisdom tradition is primarily related to “intellectuality.”³¹ Admittedly, wisdom is related to human intellectuality. Associating a wise action with a subsequent event and interpreting that event as a beneficial consequence of the wise action are certainly intellectual activities based on the Father’s voice’s own logic. As I argued, however, the concept of wisdom in the wisdom tradition, especially in patriarchal didactic wisdom discourse like Proverbs, is primarily and fundamentally *learning* of and *submission* to instructions rather than an *open-ended search* for new knowledge. Even the book of Job in which Job challenges various aspects of traditional religious and ethical teachings lacks the concept of an open-ended search for new knowledge. Fox states that, in the wisdom tradition in general, “empiricism is not the epistemological foundation of wisdom,” but submission is.³² Qohelet, however, claims that he searched for everything that has been done under the sun by using his wisdom (Eccl 1:13) and he repetitively uses the expression “I saw” (רָאִיתִי) to indicate the empirical characteristic of his knowledge. Therefore, Qohelet’s incorporation of rational intellect as a valid source of wisdom distinguishes his concept of wisdom from that of other wisdom texts or that of the Father’s voice. What follows here is a discussion of that consciousness, which, I designate “the voice of Rational Intellect,” drawing on Fox’s terms.³³ This term may not accurately describe all the cases of Qohelet’s wisdom quest, as his use of intellectual power sometimes seems better to be called “realistic” or “empirical.” But these expressions also only partially describe Qohelet’s new concept of wisdom. At this point, we will follow Fox’s designation for convenience sake. This voice is the main force that drives Qohelet to use independent reason to seek an “open-ended search for new knowledge,”³⁴ something that eventually contradicts his sage characteristics.

30 Ibid., 75.

31 Cf. Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10–31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 963.

32 Ibid., 963–64.

33 See n. 28 above.

34 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 74.

1.2.1 The Origin of the Voice of Rational Intellect

Scholars in the past often regarded Qohelet's use of independent reason as the result of foreign (Egyptian, Mesopotamian, or Greek) cultural influences and Ecclesiastes' textual and thematic dependence on other ancient texts. Nowadays, however, they largely reject such strong claims. Nevertheless, scholars still acknowledge the *indirect* influence of Hellenistic philosophy or culture as the text is usually dated to the early Hellenistic era.

This view, however, finalizes the voice as a particularly Greek-Hellenistic voice and disregards how the voice of Rational Intellect emerged out of a complex web of discourses in which Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Jewish voices were also inextricably intertwined with the rational voice from the Hellenistic world. Though increasingly fostered by the Hellenistic cultural atmosphere, the voice of Rational Intellect was not exclusively rooted in some particular literary intellectual traditions of Hellenistic culture, but rather attested widely in the ancient Near Eastern world as well as the Hellenistic world. In Bakhtinian terms, even the Hellenistic rational and empirical voice itself is not purely and exclusively a Greek voice but a voice developed through Hellenistic culture's dialogic interactions with the neighboring nations including the ancient Near Eastern world. The fact that new knowledge flourishes in the time of colonial or imperial expansion intimates such a dialogic aspect of the voice of Rational Intellect. For example, according to Flemming, in the time of European imperialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, various types of intellectuals accompanied European conquerors to "classify" and "categorize" their colonial experiences.³⁵ European conquerors were able to produce a vast range of knowledge and eventually created a new world order to control the subject people. Likewise, as Flemming points out, the time of the Greek imperial expansion was the period of "the formation of significant new philosophical schools, and of the creation of various literary corpora and canons," as various intellectuals also accompanied Alexander's campaigns.³⁶ In other words, what we often consider characteristics of Hellenistic culture, such as rational intellect, should not be construed too sharply as "Greek." It was constructed or at least facilitated through the Greek colonizers' dialogic encounters with indigenous people of the conquered territories and their cultures. Even if Hellenistic culture with its clear genealogy in classical Greek philosophical and cultural traditions constitutes a major part of the voice of Rational Intellect in Qohelet's consciousness, we should notice that rational discourses of the ancient Near East and Judea are also part of a larger discursive background of the voice of

35 Flemming, "Empires of Knowledge," 449.

36 Ibid.

Rational Intellect. Qohelet's rational intellect developed from his contact with diverse rational voices, both international and domestic, that existed in dialogic interplay under Hellenistic rule.

1.2.2 The Nature of the Voice of Rational Intellect

One of the basic characteristics of Qohelet's method of intellectual exploration is to prioritize "the autonomy of individual reason," as Fox points out.³⁷ No single literary intellectual tradition exclusively define this voice. Through Qohelet's complex dialogic interactions with various rational voices, Qohelet reformulates a kind of rational voice with his own accents. Unlike the Father's voice that Qohelet hears more directly, therefore, we may have to approach the voice of Rational Intellect in a broader fashion. Seeing that the larger context of Ptolemaic Judea facilitated the growth of rational voices, however, Hellenistic philosophies can be the starting point of our investigation of the nature of Qohelet's voice of Rational Intellect. In fact, Braun argues that individualism and empiricism, two highly-valued characteristics in Hellenistic popular philosophy, characterize Qohelet's wisdom.³⁸ For Hengel, Qohelet is an individualistic, empirical, and critical thinker the Hellenistic atmosphere produced.³⁹ Indeed, rationalism and empiricism, the two most significant epistemological foundations of the intellectual culture of the Hellenistic era, are readily discernible in Qohelet's intellectual exploration. Insofar as Hellenistic philosophies are a major part of the rational discourses with which Qohelet had dialogic contact, Hellenistic philosophies, especially Stoicism and Epicureanism, can well illuminate the basic nature of the voice of Rational Intellect.⁴⁰

In the previous chapter, I introduced that the basic Stoic principle of life and morality is "living in agreement with nature," because, as mentioned, Stoics believed that a highly intelligent god designed nature as a perfectly rational system.⁴¹ Stoics, thus, understood humans as independent rational beings considering that humans are a part of nature. Though Qohelet is not a Stoic per se, Stoic rationalism can help us grasp some aspects of Qohelet's rational voice. In terms of his autonomous utilization of reason, a passage from a writing of Seneca, a Roman Stoic of the first century CE, throw light on the cultural

37 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 81.

38 Braun, *Kohelet*, 178.

39 Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 115–28.

40 Fox also similarly argues that though "ferreting out parallels, influences, and external sources" is not required to read Ecclesiastes in its context, they can "throw light on the text and help define the issues." Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 6.

41 See chap. 4, pp. 90–91.

atmosphere under which Qohelet's rational wisdom could be cultivated. The passage reads:⁴²

The point might be made, 'If good health, rest, and freedom from pain are not going to thwart virtue, will you not pursue them?' Of course I will. Not because they are good, but because they are in accordance with nature, and because they will be taken on the basis of my good judgment. 'What then will be good in them?' Just this—being well selected. For when I put on the right sort of clothes, or walk as I should, or dine as I should, neither the dining nor the walking nor the clothes are good, but the intention I display in them by preserving a measure, in each thing, which conforms to reason ... So it is not elegant clothes which are a good in themselves, but the selection of elegant clothes, since the good is not in the thing but in the quality of the selection. It is our actions that are right, not their results ... I shall take good health and strength, if the selection is granted me, but the good will be my judgment regarding them, and not the things themselves.⁴³

In the passage above, it is clear that Stoics emphasize that each individual's use of reason is a foundation of all good conduct. As Long and Sedley comment, for Stoics, "what is good in itself" is "reasoning well."⁴⁴

It is clear that Stoics highlight reason in their way of obtaining knowledge as Qohelet does. A Stoic's view on true divination can also be interesting example in this regard. Cicero, a Roman philosopher of the first century BCE, writes:⁴⁵

I follow those who have said that there are two kinds of divination, one involving expertise, the other not. The diviners who have expertise are those who pursue new data by conjecture, having learnt their old data by observations. Those who lack expertise are the ones who foretell the future not by reason or conjecture through empirical observation of signs,

42 Though Seneca is a first-century Stoic philosopher, Long claims that his works are considered to be one of the major sources of Stoicism because no early Stoic philosophers' works survived. See Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 115. See also Brunschwig and Sedley, "Hellenistic Philosophy," 166.

43 Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:405.

44 Ibid., 408.

45 Like Seneca's works, scholars consider that Cicero's works are also one of the major sources of Hellenistic schools including Stoicism though he is a philosopher of the first century BCE. Brunschwig and Sedley claim that Cicero's works are also the earliest sources of Stoicism. See Brunschwig and Sedley, "Hellenistic Philosophy," 166; Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 115. See also Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:493.

but by either stimulating or relaxing the mind, as has often happened to dreamers, and sometimes to those who prophesy in a frenzy.⁴⁶

As Cicero writes, for Stoics, even divination, which most modern people would consider a mystic and supernatural phenomenon, is a kind of prowess rooted in reason. According to Long and Sedley, Stoics even understood divination as a part of “science” that requires “expertise.”⁴⁷ Long and Sedley also comment that the Stoic diviners’ performance should rely on knowledge of “empirically derived rules” founded on “theoretical rationale,” which has its basis on the “empirical observation of signs.”⁴⁸ According to Long, for Stoics, knowledge is not a mere impression that an external object appears to give, as observations do not guarantee the truth of what is observed because various conditions such as ill health, hallucination, bad light, and other factors can distort truth.⁴⁹ Thus, Long explains that Stoics’ concepts of knowledge are rationally affirmed cognition that cannot be refuted by any other arguments.⁵⁰ Though empiricism is an important part of Stoicism, the Stoic methodology to obtain knowledge is regarded primarily as rationalism.

The voice of Rational Intellect that Qohelet came into contact with is, as mentioned, not limited to a discourse of rationalism. Another significant attribute of this voice is found in the characteristics of empiricism. If the Stoics’ way to obtain knowledge is a rational process of verification of human perceptions, then the Epicurean method can be viewed as truly empirical because the foundation of knowledge for Epicureans is sense-perception, which Qohelet also extensively employs in his intellectual exploration. The following passage explains Epicurean epistemology; the passage is a response of Lucretius⁵¹—a Roman writer of the mid-first century BCE—to a skeptic who repudiates the reliability of perception:

Now, if someone thinks that nothing is known, one thing he doesn’t know is whether that can be known, since he admits to knowing nothing.... from where does he get his knowledge of what knowing and not knowing are? What created his preconception of true and false? And what proved to him that doubtful differs from certain? You will find that the

46 Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:260.

47 Ibid., 263.

48 Ibid., 263–4.

49 Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 123–31.

50 Ibid.

51 Though Lucretius lived much later than the first Epicureans, Long claims that Lucretius’s works appear to draw on Epicurus’s original words. See Ibid., 18–19.

preconception of true has its origin in the sense, and that the sense cannot be refuted. For something of greater reliability must be found, something possessing the intrinsic power to convict falsehoods with truths. Well, what should be considered to have greater reliability than the sense? Will reason have the power to contradict them, if it is itself the product of false sensation? For reason is in its entirety the product of the senses, so that if the senses are not true all reason becomes false as well.... Hence whatever impression the sense get at any time is true.⁵²

The text above problematizes the skeptics' self-contradictory claims about their knowing of sense's uncertainty, because skeptics deny humans' basic knowability and suspend all their judgment. As Long and Sedley explain, Epicureans argue that "any outright dismissal of the senses must appeal to some superior criterion of truth; but there is no such criterion independent of the senses."⁵³ Epicureans rely on sense to obtain knowledge more than any other methods, and it is also a significant trait of Qohelet's intellectual exploration.

A possible misunderstanding of Epicureans' empiricism is to regard that Epicureans are unaware of the limitations of sense-perception. Epicureans also knew that senses cannot give proper knowledge without preconception. Diogenes Laertius provides an explanation of the concept of preconception in Epicureanism as follows:⁵⁴

Preconception, they [the Epicureans] say, is as it were a perception, or correct opinion, or conception, or universal 'stored notion' (i.e. memory), of that which has frequently become evident externally: e.g. 'such and such a kind of thing is a man.' For as soon as the word 'man' is uttered, immediately its delineation also comes to mind by means of preconception, since the senses give the lead. Thus, what primarily underlies each name is something self-evident.... Thus preconceptions are self-evident. And opinion depends on something prior and self-evident, which is our point of reference when we say, e.g., 'How do we know if this is a man?'⁵⁵

For Epicureans, perception itself cannot constitute true knowledge. As Long explains, "preconceptions," a kind of knowledge that one obtains through

52 Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:78–79.

53 Ibid., 83.

54 Though Diogenes Laertius's works are dated to the beginning of the third century CE, he is considered to be the compiler of Epicurus's own writings. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 17–18. See also Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:494.

55 Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:87–88.

repetitive sense-perceptions, must precede a sense-perception to confirm what one perceives as valid knowledge.⁵⁶ In this respect, the Epicurean method to obtain knowledge seems to be comparable with an inductive reasoning common to empiricism.

Qohelet's use of independent reason and his empirical way of obtaining knowledge are, thus, deeply reminiscent of Hellenistic philosophies, but he is neither Greek nor a philosopher. Clearly, the voice of Rational Intellect that Qohelet hears is not a voice from a single Hellenistic intellectual, philosophical tradition. Other cultural elements may have migrated into Qohelet's cultural setting and hybridized with his own rational intellectual, cultural heritage. Homi Bhabha calls this process of creating cultural hybridity "cultural translation," a term that draws on the phenomenon of translation that essentially entails a certain level of distortion and changes.⁵⁷ According to Bhabha, the migrating cultural elements always contain a certain element that does not "lend itself to translation."⁵⁸ Based on Bakhtin's dialogic principles, the cultural dialogue should have yielded something unexpected and unpredictable. Thus, the voice of Rational Intellect cannot be precisely identified with Hellenistic schools of thought. In other words, Qohelet's autonomous use of reason for his intellectual exploration certainly resembles Stoics' prioritization of reason, but it is not Stoicism proper. Likewise, Qohelet's way to obtain new valid knowledge is reminiscent of Epicureans' empiricism, as he heavily relies on his sense-perceptions, but he is not one of the Epicureans. In Qohelet's dialogic contact with Hellenism, his cultural translation created a hybrid voice. The voice of Rational Intellect is, in Bakhtin's terms, "becoming" something rather than "being" Stoic or Epicurean—two doctrinal schools of thought that have characteristics relatively well fixed and dictated by a single authorial voice.⁵⁹ This voice in Qohelet's contradictory consciousness creates unfinalizable dialogues with the Father's voice in Qohelet's interior dialogue on wisdom.

1.3 *The Voices and Their Interpellations*

Qohelet's submissive response to the call of the Father's voice evinces his identity: Qohelet is primarily a traditional sage or a wise person if a typical sage voice is identified with patriarchal didactic wisdom discourse. More often characterized by scholars as a skeptic or a pessimist, however, Qohelet is not as submissive to traditional wisdom as the Father's voice wants him to be. He

⁵⁶ Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 23.

⁵⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), 303–37.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 321.

⁵⁹ For the concept of "becoming," or "unfinalizability," see chap. 2, p. 33.

rather resists the domination of the Father's voice and embraces the voice of Rational Intellect. Consequently, Qohelet profoundly challenges the wisdom words of the Father's voice, constantly provoking cognitive disturbances in himself. From Bakhtin's dialogic perspective, the dialogic formation of his consciousness in which Qohelet is regarded to have embraced contradictory voices, somewhat explains Qohelet's resistance against the domination of the Father's voice. Regarding the Father's voice's authority, which should have powerfully affected the formation of Qohelet's sage identity, we still need to look into a more detailed procedure of the dialogic formation of Qohelet's identity. Louis Althusser's theory of "interpellation" can aptly illustrate the question, how Qohelet was able to resist the domination of the Father's voice.

1.3.1 The Dominant Ideology and Resistance of Minority Discourse

Althusser's theory of interpellation insightfully explains the powerful effect of ideology in the formation of an individual's subjectivity. In his explanation of the function of ideology, Althusser compares ideology with a police "hailing" of an individual. The core statement of Althusser's famous interpellation theory reads:

I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'⁶⁰

Althusser claims that we respond to the hailing of ideology like an individual hailed by a police officer. Althusser, however, does not merely use the dreadful imagery of the hailing of police officers, "Hey, you there!" to vividly describe the power or effect of ideology. The protocol of a police officer's hailing and an individual's response is a ready-made dialogue in which both parties should submissively play their roles. As Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips explain, "we affiliate ourselves to the subject position that the interpellation has created" and "reproduce the ideology."⁶¹ This dialogic interaction itself is, thus,

60 Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards An Investigation," in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, intro. Frederic Jameson (1971; repr., New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 118.

61 Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 15.

an act of reproduction and reinforcement of ideology. Then, people perform ideological dialogues, in perhaps most cases, without recognizing the ideological dimension of their speech acts, especially how their dialogues stealthily and ideologically construct their consciousnesses. For Bakhtin as well, our consciousnesses are formed dialogically. Bakhtin insists, "The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness."⁶² If Bakhtin's insights about dialogue help us understand the basic dialogic process of consciousness-formation, Althusser's interpellation theory casts light on the ideological aspect of this dialogue.

What Althusser explains through his interpellation theory is the subject formation of an individual, but he does not explain how one can resist the domination of an authoritative voice. Althusser, in fact, gives an impression that there is hardly any chance for an individual to resist the interpellation of a dominant ideology since there seems to be no way for the individual to ignore the hailing of "a police officer," so to speak. But, as Jørgensen and Phillips point out, "subjects do not become interpellated in just one subject position: different discourses give the subject different, and possibly contradictory, positions from which to speak."⁶³ Multiple interpellations directed toward a single subject enable the subject to resist the domination of a particular ideology. The argument that Jørgensen and Phillips offer supplements elements that Althusser overlooked about interpellation—multiple hailings and chances of resistance. We should note, thus, that it is not individuals' inherent independent power that enables them to resist ideological domination but another ideological hailing. An individual who rejects the dominant ideology is also a product of resistance/minority discourses behind which there is an ideology that opposes the dominant ideology. Therefore, a person's being dominated by an ideology and his or her resistance to it are a fundamentally dialogic process. In this regard, Qohelet is not a genuinely subversive character. In part, he is a good submissive subject to the Father's voice, but the hailing of other discourses including the voice of Rational Intellect constructed his subjectivity in a way that enabled him to resist the complete domination of the Father's voice.

This struggle of conflicting ideologies implies that, despite the monologic appearance of a dominant ideology, there cannot be a single authoritative voice in a society that perfectly controls its members. In Bakhtin's terms, an ideological domination may seem "monologic" but is always "dialogic." According to Raymond Williams, "a lived hegemony is always a process," because hegemony is "continually ... renewed, recreated, defended, and modified"

62 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 287.

63 Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*, 17.

and “continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged” by “the concepts of counter-hegemony and alternative hegemony.”⁶⁴ Therefore, a dominant ideology does not mechanically dictate a discourse or construct a particular subject, but it emerges out of dialogic interactions with competing minor voices and continually re-emerges. No social group is composed of homogeneous clones of the dominant ideology. Although, as Althusser believed, an ideological domination over the majority of the population in a society is observable, the hegemonic position of the dominant ideology is never stable, but always in dialogic tension. Qohelet’s contradictory consciousness mirrors this concept. the Father’s hailing—the voice indeed uses the rhetoric of interpellation—captures Qohelet, but the voice does not completely control him because the hailing of other discourses, most prominently the voice of Rational Intellect, also catches him. As he incorporates the voice of Rational Intellect in his consciousness, Qohelet is no longer a *good* subject vis-à-vis the Father’s hailing.

1.4 *Submission and Open-Ended Search as Qohelet’s Wisdom*

Qohelet’s ideas about wisdom were constructed by his dialogic contact with multiple voices, notably the Father’s voice and the voice of the Rational Intellect. For Qohelet, submitting to the Father’s voice is the foundation of the life of wisdom. Autonomous intellectual explorations are fundamentally incompatible with the principle of wisdom’s way that the Father’s voice establishes. Nevertheless, searching for new knowledge using his rational intellect is also a valid foundation of wisdom for Qohelet, even though his new wisdom quest requires resistance to the Father’s voice. In Bakhtin’s terms, the Father’s voice does not make other voices “defenseless” in order to make them serve the Father’s “own new purposes.”⁶⁵ The Father’s voice in Qohelet’s consciousness does not singularly author Qohelet’s words. Neither the Father’s voice nor the voice of the Rational Intellect, therefore, fully represents Qohelet’s concepts of wisdom. Qohelet’s identity is unfinalizable, and the foundation of Qohelet’s wisdom is both submission *and* open-ended search. Qohelet is always a man of traditional wisdom as well as rational intellect. We should, thus, attend to both voices equally to properly understand his contradictory reflections on wisdom.

Although I portray these voices as independent and equally valid ideological speaking subjects in my analysis of Qohelet’s contradictory utterances, we should remember that the real speaking subject is always Qohelet, the whole person. Even when Qohelet seems to be mainly under the dialogic influence

64 Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (1977; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 112–13.

65 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 197.

of the Father's voice, for instance, "the rational Qohelet"⁶⁶ does not disappear but always coexists and speaks simultaneously. Like Raskolnikov's dialogized interior monologue in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Qohelet's utterances have layers of voices with his own intonations and accents.⁶⁷ As Bakhtin argues, "all words in it [dialogized interior monologue] are double-voiced."⁶⁸ Bakhtinian readers, thus, should consistently strive to hear the voice sounding from a hidden layer, under the surface voice, and imaginatively observe Qohelet's countenances that his internal dialogue produces. Interpenetrating each other in Qohelet's consciousness, these conflicting voices make himself agonize over various issues in his wisdom discourse. For example, when Qohelet claims, "the same fate comes to all," in Eccl 9:2, he is, of course, under the dialogic influence of the voice of Rational Intellect that seeks reasonable and empirically verifiable knowledge, but we must also hear the sage side voice in his consciousness, hidden under the surface layer, that simultaneously speaks in an astonished, confused, and agitated tone. While I will analyze and discuss Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue in the following chapter in detail, a point that has to be made clear here is that the real speaking subject is always Qohelet, not any particular voice.

Consequently, Qohelet becomes an agonized intellectual. Not only as a traditional sage but also as a seeker of new knowledge, he increased his wisdom. Because of the fundamental chasm between Qohelet's methodological principles of wisdom—submission and open-ended search—he frustratingly realized that his inner conflicts get harsher as he gets wiser. According to Eccl 1:18, he even states that wisdom and knowledge absurdly increase pain and vexation. Though Qohelet's claim of the direct proportional relationship between wisdom and pain appears at the very first chapter of the book, the claim is not just an initial, temporary thought that changes later but something that he had constantly felt. This seemingly sweeping generalization, "wisdom only increases pain," summarizes his intellectual journey. Qohelet's devotion to an intellectual life led him to deep struggles in his consciousness, and Qohelet's thought became contradictory and unfinalizable. He became an agonized intellectual.

Qohelet's חֵלֶל-claims, which he frequently uses to describe the absurdity of his observations and experiences, succinctly articulate his agony. Not all people would so frequently and seriously claim that everything is absurd

66 I use the designation, "the rational Qohelet" to imply that mainly the voice of Rational Intellect affects Qohelet or his utterances. Also, I use an expression, "the sage Qohelet," to indicate that Qohelet is mainly under the dialogic influence of the Fathers' voice or corresponds to the basic teachings of patriarchal didactic wisdom discourse.

67 For Raskolnikov's dialogized interior monologue, see chap. 2, pp. 26–27 above.

68 See chap. 2, p. 27 above.

as Qohelet does even if they observe and experience the same like Qohelet. If Qohelet's consciousness was not authored by multiple conflicting voices simultaneously, Qohelet's might not have suffered so much from feeling הבל, that is, absurdity. If he were a typical sage, whose identity is formed mainly by the Father's voice, he could have managed to treat certain observations that do not correspond to the wisdom mythos as exceptions or insignificant events. Contrarily, if Qohelet were a philosopher like Stoics and Epicureans, he did not expect to see God's maintenance of the world as typical Jewish sages might have done. But Qohelet internalized these conflicting voices and did not subordinate one voice to the other. As the voices form his consciousness, Qohelet starts recognizing "insignificant events" seriously and feeling "absurd," due to the discrepancy between the world of wisdom mythos and the world he observes. He wrestles with contradictory ideas. Thus, Qohelet says in Eccl 1:13–14 that, after searching for everything that has been done under the sun and after seeing everything, he realizes that all is "הבל," that is, "absurd" and a pursuit of wind. (Then, in v. 18, he laments that his wisdom only increased pain.)

Of course, no single English word including "absurd" can fully or precisely express what the word הבל exactly means in each context out of thirty-eight occurrences in Ecclesiastes. The word literally means "breath" or "vapor," and it is always used metaphorically in the book. A specific translation of the word, thus, cannot be comprehensive of the ample meanings of the metaphor unless its translation also is a similar metaphor, which does not seem to exist in English expressions.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the word "absurd" best describes the meaning of הבל in Eccl 1:14 (and perhaps most other passages too). The passage in Eccl 1:12–18, as a memoir of his life, summarizes Qohelet's intellectual journey in which he encounters numerous absurd experiences and observations that eventually made himself a deeply agonized intellectual.

For instance, in Eccl 8:12b, Qohelet says, "I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they stand in fear before him." At the same time in Eccl 8:12a, however, he says "Though sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives." What he observes is, again, truly absurd. The passage in Eccl 6:2 is another good example. In this passage, Qohelet says there are people to whom God gives wealth and honor but does not allow to enjoy them.

69 The following is the list of scholars' translations/interpretations of the word summarized by Schoors: "futility," "empty," "sorry thing," "senseless thing," "transient thing," "transitoriness," "uselessness, futility," "the deficiency of existence in its totality," "vanity," "the expression of a nihilistic judgment on life and its values," "ephemerality," "worthlessness," "folly," "unsubstantiality," "cosmic iniquity, absence of an ethical principle," "mystery or incomprehensibility," "enigma," "irony," "the contingent rationality of the created reality." See Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 2:120.

This is absurd too. Qohelet says in Eccl 8:14 that he notices that certain bad things, which only the wicked deserve, befall to the righteous and good things, which only the righteous deserve, befall to the wicked. And he says it is הבל, that is, absurd. As Fox also argues, Qohelet's הבל-claims most often express the sense of absurdity that arises when he recognizes "the tension between a certain reality and a framework of expectations."⁷⁰ Qohelet's frequent use of the word הבל, thus, succinctly articulates Qohelet's agony, his frustration.

Moreover, even in some cases where certain other words perhaps fit better, the word "absurd" still well explains the meanings of הבל to an extent. For example, in the second chapter of the book, Qohelet tries to experience pleasure and merriment through various experiments such as drinking wine, achieving great things, and possessing wealth. At the outset of the chapter (2:1), however, he already concludes that such activities are הבל, indicating the futility or vanity of such things. In this case, הבל is maybe better translated as "futile" or "vain." Or perhaps the word, "insubstantiality," also well describes the sense of הבל in Eccl 2:1, as the feeling of futility could have come from unexpectedly insubstantial results of his experiments both in quality or quantity. Maybe the words such as "transience" or "ephemerality" can be possible options. Nevertheless, the word "absurd," also aptly describes הבל in Eccl 2:1. As he admits in Eccl 2:11 (where he says there is no advantage in everything he has done), this sense of vanity in Eccl 2:1 arises from the discrepancy between his experimental actions, which are supposed to result in proper pleasure and merriment, and some absurd consequences. Moreover, he already knows what he is doing is vain, but he continues to do it: that is an absurd action. Thus, his experimental actions and their results in Eccl 2 are הבל, that is, absurd, as well as vain, insubstantial, and ephemeral. Therefore, Qohelet's הבל-claims most often occur to express absurdity, the sense that arises out of the recognition of unexpected consequences of various actions and events in negative ways. What is more, as the conflicting voices of wisdom simultaneously author Qohelet's consciousness, he starts sensing his contradictory mind and having absurd feelings. His life of wisdom absurdly increased pain and vexation. Everything seems הבל for Qohelet.

To understand the dialogic process of the formation of Qohelet's contradictory consciousness, we looked into how Qohelet's concept of wisdom was

70 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 31. For Fox, "[הבל] means 'absurd.'" Ibid., 35. Following Fox, Schoors similarly argues, "Absurdity arises from a contradiction between two undeniable realities. Absurdity means that one sees that ideas, visions, convictions often do not tally with reality as it is experienced." Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 2:125.

shaped. As demonstrated, we can notice the two core voices in Qohelet's consciousness: the Father's voice and the voice of Rational Intellect. These are the voices that constitute Qohelet's wisdom discourse, a foundational subject matter of his words. Now, to find a few other voices that are also a significant part of Qohelet's consciousness, we now turn to Qohelet's justice discourse, a subcategory of his wisdom discourse. As indicated earlier in this chapter, living in conformity with God's divine order does not merely signify one's wisdom but also one's mindfulness of justice in the wisdom tradition. Qohelet's wisdom discourse also corresponds to this trait. Qohelet's words on justice, therefore, will reveal a few more voices that constructed Qohelet's complex consciousness. In the following section, therefore, we will investigate Qohelet's justice discourse.

2 The Voices in the Construction of Qohelet's Perspective on Social Justice

Humans as dialogic beings perceive and understand the world through dialogues. For Bakhtin, "life by its very nature is dialogic," and, thus, life is participating in "the world symposium" and becomes part of "dialogic fabric."⁷¹ Social discourses generate knowledge that becomes the foundation of our understanding of life events. We recognize social injustice not through our autonomous and purely independent perceptions of the world, but through our dialogic participation in justice discourses of our own contexts. This is precisely why the use of the Nazi flag under which Germans committed unspeakable savageries is understood to be offensive to most people around the world, while what is known as Japan's "war-crime flag" (also called the Rising Sun flag) under which Japan committed no less brutal violence and massacre during World War II is still frequently used in many different contexts without stirring controversy, at least in the United States.⁷² The Shoah (or the Holocaust) is, of

⁷¹ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 293.

⁷² "The most infamous emblem of the horrors of wartime Japan, the Rising sun flag [war-crime flag], was never banned, and it still flies today. Much like the Confederate battle flag, which was used by several Confederate army units, the Rising Sun flag was a flag of war [during the World War II].... Despite its history, the Rising Sun flag remains in use.... you can spot the flag on cans of Asahi beer or in the flag of the Asahi Shimbun newspaper company.... In the United States or Europe, the controversy surrounding the Rising Sun flag is little known. Sometimes, the flag is even co-opted by Westerners as a kitsch symbol of Japan: In one recent example, British rock band Muse prominently used the flag during a rock video shot in Japan. Internet users in Asia were incensed." See Adam Taylor, "Japan has a Flag Problem, Too," *The Washington Post*, June 27, 2015, <https://www>

course, a well-known topic in the justice discourses of our time, but the atrocities perpetrated by Japan during World War II are relatively much less known.

By the same token, Qohelet's recognition of social injustice is not merely comprised of his own observations; he constructed his view through his dialogic contact with many voices of justice discourses, which generated clusters of information about social issues of his time. Of course, the wisdom words of the Father's voice are, again, a potent dialogic influence on Qohelet in the construction of Qohelet's justice discourse as it is a subcategory of his wisdom discourse. However, there are, at least, two other voices that enable Qohelet to recognize the problems of his society: the voice of the Victims and the Apocalyptic voice. As we will see, these voices help Qohelet develop his sensitivity to the oppression of the poor from their own life situations. These voices motivate him to stand by the oppressed persistently. It is, perhaps, intriguing to note that despite many contradictions in Qohelet's speeches, his critiques of the powerful are thorough and persistent. Nevertheless, one must also note that Qohelet, under the dialogic influence of the Father's voice, sometimes claims the validity of the divine order and God's justice. In other words, though Qohelet never explicitly claims that individuals' lack of wisdom, wickedness, and stupidity are the main causes of their sufferings, he implicitly affirms individuals' responsibility for their sufferings. We must not forget that Qohelet is also a man of rational intellect, a man who tries to understand the world without a religious filter. For the rational Qohelet, there is no strict causality between one's acts and sufferings. As all these voices are dialogized in Qohelet's consciousness, Qohelet's theological reflections on the justice issues of his society become complex and contradictory.

2.1 *Historical Circumstances*

Before we discuss the origins and the nature of the voice of the Victims and the Apocalyptic voice, we need to explore historical circumstances of Qohelet's time. All human utterances are rooted in specific historical circumstances, and particularly so are voices that constitute justice discourses. As we saw, one must be aware of the historical context of Qohelet to understand why and how "the sage Qohelet,"⁷³ who is expected to submit completely to the Father's voice, is also able to follow his autonomous observations and reason in search of new knowledge. To better identify and hear the voices that construct

.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/06/27/japan-has-a-flag-problem-too/
See also Brian Ashcraft, "Muse Uses Japan's Rising Sun Imagery, Forgets It Pisses People Off," *Kotaku*, April 23, 2013, <http://kotaku.com/muse-uses-japans-rising-sun-imagery-for-get-it-pisses-477840958>. See also: <http://english.anti-risingsunflag.net>.

73 See n. 66 above.

Qohelet's perspective on social justice, therefore, one must first have at least a rudimentary grasp of particular historical aspects of Qohelet's time that are linked with justice issues.

Considering the fact that Ecclesiastes is dated most probably to the third century BCE, or perhaps between 500 and 200 BCE, we can assume that Qohelet should have observed extreme conditions impoverished both by the devastation of war and by a series of colonization of the land by the Persian and Ptolemaic empires. According to archaeological finds in Jerusalem, after the fall of the Jerusalem Temple until the second century BCE, the economic situation of the land of Persian Yehud, or early Hellenistic Judea, was not well recovered from impoverishment. Andrea M. Berlin explains the situation as follows:

Jerusalem continued to be the only city in Judea, and the archaeological evidence shows it to have been small and materially rather poor throughout the third century [BCE]. Residents occupied only the City of David ridge south of the Temple Mount. Finds in this area included a few imported saucers and bowls (though no examples of the fancier table wares of Italy, Greece, or the Aegean), but most of the pottery was local in manufacture and utilitarian in function. In a letter sent to the council of elders shortly after he took Jerusalem at the end of the third century [BCE], Antiochus III commented twice on the city's underpopulation.⁷⁴

Qohelet lived in an underpopulated and poor city, Jerusalem. One of the reasons that Jerusalem could not rapidly recover from such conditions after the Babylonian destruction is not just because of the consecutive invasions of the world powers but also because of its geographical disadvantages. As Hengel notes, "Greek writers scarcely refer to the Jews" because "the small Jewish temple state in the highlands between the Dead Sea and the coastal region was not of sufficient importance politically or economically to attract the attention of historians."⁷⁵ Based on the characteristics of pottery finds in Judea dated to the early Hellenistic period, Marie-Christine Halpern-Zylberstein also notes that

74 Berlin, "Between the Large Forces: Palestine in the Hellenistic Period," *BA* 60 (1997): 2–51. Jack Pastor also argues that "Jerusalem was the only truly urban settlement in Judea ... It appears that Ptolemaic urbanization was dictated by a desire to control the commercial routes.... Since Judea does not lie athwart any major commercial routes it would not have been necessary to develop new urban centers within her borders." See Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 31.

75 Martin Hengel, "The Political and Social History of Palestine From Alexander to Antiochus III (333–187 B.C.E)," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 2, *the Hellenistic Age*, ed. W. D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 49.

Palestine was “somewhat removed from the great cultural and commercial movements” of the time and “often ravaged by wars.”⁷⁶ According to Eccl 4:1–3, the oppression and exploitation of the poor are so horrible that it is better to die than to live under oppression, and not being born is even better than dying quickly. In light of the bleak economic situations in Judea, we can imagine the hardships Qohelet observed.

Despite the poverty of the general population in Judea in Qohelet’s time, there should have been a small group of privileged people who collaborated with the foreign rulers. The Tobiads are a prominent example in the Ptolemaic period, and Josephus’s accounts provide us with rich depictions of the life of the privileged in Ptolemaic Judea.⁷⁷ Of course, Josephus’s reports should be treated with caution to ward off propagandistic or legendary aspects of the accounts. What interests us about the Tobiads is their unusually and exceptionally rich and privileged status in the Hellenistic period. As we will see, an extreme social stratification is observable; the life of the privileged and the powerful was greatly contrasted with that of the poor and the powerless.

Among the members of the Tobiads, Joseph is an example that most clearly shows the social inequity of Judea in the early Hellenistic era. Josephus reports that Joseph’s mother was a sister of the high priest Onias. The high priest was, as it is generally recognized, not only a cultic leader but also the local, political power in the early Hellenistic period.⁷⁸ Given the circumstances, Joseph’s father, Tobias—considered to be one of the descendants of Tobiah the Ammonite, a contemporary to Nehemiah—married the high priest’s sister.

76 Halpern-Zylberstein, “The Archeology of Hellenistic Palestine,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 2, *the Hellenistic Age*, ed. W. D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 28. This scholar speaks about how Israel managed to preserve their indigenous culture despite the general influence of Hellenistic culture.

77 We also have Zenon papyri that tell us an account of Tobias’s sale of a slave girl to Zenon, a representative of Apollonios the dioketes (a financial officer of Ptolemy) and two letters from Tobias sent to Apollonios in Zenon papyri that signify the privileged status of the Tobiads in the third century BCE. While Zenon papyri are historically more reliable than Josephus’s works, they rather offer a general picture of the economy of the Ptolemaic empire, and their descriptions of Tobiads are quite limited and fragmentary. For the account of Tobias’s sale of a slave girl to Zenon, and Tobias’s two letters to Apollonios, see P.Cair.Zen. 59003; 59075; 59076. Cf. Victor Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks, ed., *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* (Cambridge: Magnes Press, 1957), 118–21, 125–30. In addition, one of Zenon papyri mentions that Zenon once visited the “Land of Toubias.” See P.Lond.inv. 2358 (A) (unpublished). See also Tcherikover and Fuks, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, 123.

78 Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*, vol. 2, *the Coming of the Greeks: The Early Hellenistic Period (335–175 BCE)*, LSTS 68 (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 185–92.

Joseph was born as a nephew of the high priest, and he lived in Jerusalem.⁷⁹ This marriage suggests that the Tobiads had already become a powerful and influential family in Jerusalem at that time. As Victor Tcherikover points out, however, Joseph's remarkable career, which will be shown below, might not have been even possible if he had no connection to the ruling class in Judea.⁸⁰ Josephus's accounts of Joseph read:

Now Joseph, after sending to his various friends in Samaria and borrowing money, made ready the things needed for his journey, such as clothes, drinking-vessels, and pack-animals, which equipment he procured for about twenty thousand drachmas, and came to Alexandria.... at that time all the chief men and magistrates of the cities of Syria and Phoenicia were coming there to bid for the tax-farming rights which the king used to sell every year to the wealthy men in each city. (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.168–69 [Marcus, LCL])

Now when the day came round on which the rights to farm taxes in the cities were to be sold, bids were made by those eminent in rank in the various provinces.... Joseph came forward and accused the bidders of having made an agreement to offer the king a low price for the taxes, whereas he for his part promised to give double that amount and send over to the king the property of those who had been remiss toward his house.... Thereupon the king, who heard him gladly, said that he would confirm the sale of the tax-farming rights to him, as he was likely to increase his revenue.... (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.175–77 [Marcus, LCL])

This good fortune he enjoyed for twenty-two years.... (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.186 [Marcus, LCL])

As the story suggests, Joseph's obtaining favor from Ptolemy gave the Tobiads unprecedented wealth and privileges. Berlin points out that Joseph was authorized by Ptolemy III Euergetes (246–221 BCE) to collect taxes for almost entire Levant area.⁸¹ But the cost of the privileges that the Tobiads enjoyed was the extraordinary exploitation of the ordinary people. According to Grabbe, to maximize their wealth, Ptolemies maintained sensible relations with the local

79 Josephus, *Ant.* 12.160.

80 Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, trans. S. Applebaum, preface and intro. by John J. Collins (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 126. Citations refer to Baker edition.

81 Berlin, "Between the Large Forces," 12.

native elite.⁸² Tobiads were those local native elites. As Tcherikover notes, the Tobiads, thus, managed to be a relatively independent local power in exchange for their loyalty to the Ptolemies.⁸³ As a result, the ordinary people had to suffer from extreme exploitation for the sake of the wealth of both the local elites and the foreign rulers. Joseph, for instance, promises the king that he would violently take the whole property of those who do not pay their taxes and hand it over to the king. Regardless of the story's factuality, Josephus hints at how the powerful treated the powerless at that time. As Grabbe aptly puts it, subjugated nations for Ptolemies were "milk cows, as producers of wealth for the ruling power." Josephus accounts do seem to reflect the economic structure of the early Hellenistic Judea in which the Ptolemies tried to maximize revenue by using local "tax-farmers," the consequential growth of a small number of local aristocrats, and the atrocities that the powerless experienced. The growth of the Tobiads under the Ptolemaic empire corresponds to the Greek rulers' pragmatic strategy to exploit the subject people, which alludes to the heavy burdens of taxes and labors demanded of the majority of the ordinary people. The role that Joseph played as a local tax farmer can be imagined in this light.

I discussed quite a specific economic aspect of Judea in the early Hellenistic period. If we should date the text to the Persian period, however, one may question whether or not the discussion above can represent the oppression that Qohelet observes and reports. It may not precisely describe the conditions of Persian Yehud, but the colonial context of Persian Yehud seems not radically different either. According to Seow, who dates Ecclesiastes to the Persian period, though the economic situation in Yehud after Nehemiah's reform should have been temporarily improved, Qohelet did experience a time of "extreme poverty," for example, lending money to eat for survival or to pay taxes, or selling children into slavery, and so forth.⁸⁴ According to Seow, it is not until the Persian period that the use of money becomes pervasive in Israel, that is, Yehud.⁸⁵ The introduction and widespread use of a monetary system should have affected most people negatively as it does in the early Hellenistic period. The monetary system benefits the colonizers and the local ruling class by providing them with a convenient means of collecting and maximizing taxes. The ordinary population becomes poorer, and the social stratification deepens more rapidly due to the monetary system. The powerless become more vul-

82 Grabbe, *A History of Jews and Judaism*, 2:210–211, 221. See also Grabbe, *A History of Jews and Judaism*, 1:191.

83 Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 64–65.

84 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 31.

85 *Ibid.*, 21.

nerable to discrimination and oppression, and as we will see below, Qohelet, under the dialogic influence of the voice of the Victims and the Apocalyptic voice, empathetically observes and reports on these situations.

2.2 *The Voice of the Victims*

A variety of voices can constitute justice discourses, but the most pressing voice that demands justice is probably the voice of the ones who are systematically victimized in society. The hardships that the social structure of Qohelet's time imposed on the powerless also created a discourse of the victimized. The voice that we must heed first is, thus, this voice, which may be termed "the voice of the Victims."⁸⁶

Reviving the voice of the oppressed, in general, might be a challenging task since such a voice is oftentimes under-represented or go completely unheard by others. Fortunately, however, Qohelet seems to have listened to the voice of the Victims quite closely and seriously, and he finds his expression in Lamentations when he is under the dialogic influence of the voice of the Victims. The voice from Lamentations will, thus, disclose the basic nature of the voice of the Victims that Qohelet embraced. Here are two important passages from Lamentations.

בכו תבכה בלילה ודמעתה על לחיה אין־לה מנחם מכל־אהביה כל־רעיה בגדו בה
היו לה לאיבים (Lam 1:2)

She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers, there is no comforter for her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies. (NRSV with my modifications)

פרשה ציון בידיה אין מנחם לה צוה יהוה ליעקב סביביו צריו היתה ירושלם לגדה
ביניהם (Lam 1:17)

Zion stretches out her hands, but there is no comforter for her; the Lord has commanded against Jacob that his neighbors should become his foes; Jerusalem has become a filthy thing among them. (NRSV with my modifications)

86 Marvin A. Sweeney also calls the voice in Lamentations "the voice of the victims." See n. 87 below.

And here are Qohelet's laments under the dialogic influence of the voice of the Victims. Qohelet is, of course, not one of the victimized in his society. He does not, therefore, speak as a victim but a benevolent intellectual elite who speaks for them; that is, he criticizes the social inequities and reveals the wretchedness of the life of the oppressed.

ושבתי אני ואראה את־כל־העשקים אשר נעשים תחת השמש והנה דמעת העשקים
ואין להם מנחם ומיד עשקיהם כח ואין להם מנחם: (Eccl 4:1)

Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed but there is no comforter for them; Power is from the hand of their oppressors, but there is no comforter for them. (NRSV with my modifications)

Marvin A. Sweeney explains that Lamentations, as cultic poetry of the liturgy, was probably originated from the destruction of the Solomon's Temple, and expresses suffering and mourning of Israel using the metaphor of widow who has lost her children.⁸⁷ The phrase "the voice of the victims" is, in fact, a designation that Sweeney uses in his work to describe the cries of the ones who suffer from the loss of their temple in Lamentations.⁸⁸ What is particularly notable here are Qohelet's laments אין להם מנחם (there is no comforter for them), והנה דמעת העשקים (Look, the tears of the oppressed), and מיד עשקיהם כח (Power is from the hand of their oppressors). These words strongly remind us of some expressions and imagery from Lamentations. In Lam 1:2 and 17, for instance, almost the same expression "אין מנחם לה" (there is no comforter for her [Israel]) appears, describing the isolation of and antagonism toward daughter Zion, that is, Israel. Though not listed above, also in Lam 1:9, 16, and 21, similar expressions that lament over the lack of comforter for the oppressed appear repeatedly.⁸⁹ In Lam 1:2 in particular, the poet, like Qohelet, wants us to observe "Israel's tears" or "her tears" (דמעתה), the painful lives of the victims. The remarkable resemblance in language and imagery between Qohelet's laments in Eccl 4:1 and the select passages from Lamentations above does not seem to be a mere coincidence. Qohelet encounters the voice of the Victims, realizes the crisis and catastrophe of the oppressed of his society, and represents the

87 Sweeney, *Reading the Hebrew Bible After the Shoah: Engaging Holocaust Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 182–86.

88 Ibid., 167–87.

89 For example, the following expression appears in Lam 1:16: "a comforter is far from me."

voice of the oppressed through a memorable rhetoric in Lamentations with his own intonations and accents.

The most prominent aspect of the voice of the Victims that Qohelet reveals through the utilization of the cultic expressions in Lamentations is to regard the sufferings of the oppressed as a problem of power rather than a result of their sins. As prophetic texts frequently tell us, daughter of Zion is recognized as a sinful woman, rather than a victim, who deserves all her sufferings because she tremendously incited God's anger. However, as Carleen Mandolfo argues, "the identity that she [daughter of Zion] crafts for herself is that of the victimized woman and bereft mother in contrast to the villain of Jeremiah's 'narrative.'"⁹⁰ Daughter Zion speaks from the perspective of the victimized disputing oppressive aspects of the prophets' rhetoric that justifies national tragedies in defense of God's justice.⁹¹ More precisely speaking, world powers are not the only issue for the poet; Lamentations considers God to be ultimately responsible for the fall of Jerusalem. In Lam 1:17, for instance, the *Lord* is even depicted as the enemy of Israel, and the oppression is not merely a sporadic individual incident but a wholesale problem of which God is ultimately in charge.

Likewise, the voice of the Victims that Qohelet came into contact with attributes the sufferings of the oppressed to the powerful, ultimately to God, rather than their sins. The passage in Eccl 4:1 clearly states that "power is from the hand of their oppressors." In addition, Eccl 5:7 too discloses the idea that the ones who hold power are responsible for the sufferings of the oppressed. The passage reads:

אם-עשק רש וגול משפט וצדק תראה במדינה אלתתמה על-החפץ כי גבה⁹² מעל גבה
שמר וגבהים עליהם (Eccl 5:7)

90 Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations*, SemeiaSt (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 89.

91 According to Mandolfo, there is another voice that she calls "didactic voice," whose perspective is aligned with daughter Zion in Lamentations. Ibid., 55–77.

92 Seow argues that though most scholars take גבה as a "high" rank official, such a meaning is not found anywhere else. Instead, the word is always "an arrogant one" or "haughty one." Thus, for Seow, the word indicates anyone whose socioeconomic or political status is higher than ordinary people, "but not necessarily a bureaucrat." It is thus perhaps better to take the term as "arrogant" or "haughty one." Nevertheless, the general impression that the sentence conveys is the hierarchical structure of state administration in which higher officials are generally considered to be in a position to be haughty. See Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 203–04.

If you see the oppression of the poor and the robbery of justice and righteousness in a province, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. (NRSV with my modifications)

Qohelet exposes how much the asymmetrical power structure made the social inequities pervasive in his world, sarcastically advising his audiences/readers that “the robbery of judgment and righteousness”⁹³ is nothing shocking. As discussed, during the early Hellenistic era, the Ptolemies used local aristocrats as tax-collectors to maximize their benefits, and Josephus’s account of how Joseph outbid his competitors dramatically shows the resultant oppression over the poor. Qohelet’s descriptions of his world that he offers under the dialogic influence of the voice of the Victims in Eccl 5:7 well reflect such circumstances. What is more, though Qohelet does not explicitly blame God for the social inequities described in Eccl 5:7 as well as in 4:1, Qohelet’s reasoning should have reached the thought that God is ultimately responsible for the sufferings of the oppressed since he believes that God controls the world as the ultimate power. Throughout Ecclesiastes, Qohelet asserts the arbitrariness of the world in which God is the sovereign power. In Eccl 9:1, for instance, Qohelet acknowledges that everything is the hand of God but no one knows how things will work. According to Eccl 6:2 as well, God gives everything to a person, such as wealth and honor, but does not allow that person to enjoy what he or she possesses. God for Qohelet seems to be capricious. Thus, when Qohelet said no one comforts the oppressed and the powerful are the oppressors, Qohelet allusively meant that even God did not comfort the oppressed but rather let the human oppressors use their power unjustly against the powerless as in Lamentations.

Admittedly, however, the sufferers in Lamentations are different from the oppressed in Ecclesiastes. Lamentations as cultic poetry grieves over the sufferings of the entire Israel precipitated by the destruction of the First temple and Jerusalem while Qohelet refers to specific social groups marginalized in his society. As mentioned, nonetheless, the striking similitude in the theological

93 The terms **משפט וצדק** could be a typical hendiadys **משפט וצדקה**, which is regularly understood simply as “justice,” and, therefore, the phrase **משפט וצדק גזל** may mean “the robbery of justice.” According to Fox, however, the expression **משפט וצדק** is a variation of another hendiadys, **משפט צדק**, that expresses “just due,” or “righteous judgment,” and, thus, the oppression described in 5:7 is a deprivation of the “just due” of the poor, meaning something they earned and deserve having. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 234. Seow translates the phrase as “violation of justice and righteousness” taking the verb **גזל** (to take away) figuratively as “to violate.” See Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 202.

perspective, expressions, and imagery between Qohelet's laments in Eccl 4:1 and the select passages from Lamentations above cannot be just an accidental happening. Rather, Qohelet intentionally utilizes well known cultic rhetorics to reveal the hardships of the oppressed in his society. Qohelet, through the voice of the Victims, realizes that the oppressed in his society live in situations that parallel the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and tries to appeal to the moral consciousnesses of his contemporaries drawing on the rhetorics of Lamentations that remind of the collective memory of the devastation of Judah.

2.2.1 The Voice of the Victims and Qohelet's Moral Consciousness as a Sage

Qohelet's recognitions of social injustice, especially the oppression of the poor, are certainly indebted to the voice of the Victims, but such awareness of social problems is not a unique characteristic of the victims. As mentioned, the Father's voice also urges him to pursue justice. According to Sandoval, the way of wisdom that Proverbs promotes is ultimately a virtuous life that leads to "genuine human flourishing" rather than mere personal prosperity and security.⁹⁴ Qohelet's empathy with the poor or the oppressed is a very basic virtue of the sages. Numerous passages in Proverbs, of course, attest the sages' critique of their society from the perspective of the victimized, especially the corruption of the powerful and the oppression of the poor. Here are a few examples:

רִב־אֶכֶל נִיר רֹאשִׁים וַיֵּשׁ נִסְפָה בְּלֹא מִשְׁפָּט (Prov 13:23)

The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice (NRSV).

עֹשִׂיר בְּרִשְׁתּוֹ יִמְשֹׁל וְעֹבֵד לֹוֹה לְאִישׁ מְלוּוֹ (Prov 22:7)

The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender (NRSV).

94 Sandoval, *The Discourse of Wealth and Poverty*, 48.

95 As Fox notices, Prov 22:7 reveals the social conditions where the poor are actually ruled by the rich and sometimes become slaves for their unpaid debts. See Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 699. Perhaps, it is also possible to imagine that a poor one who are emotionally enslaved to the idea that he or she is in debt to the lender. However, considering the impoverished circumstances of Judah, class division between the rich and the poor, and the slavery system of the time, Fox's claim seems correct.

(15) ארי־נהם ודב שוקק משל רשע על עס־דל
(16) נגיד חסר תבונות ורב מעשקות שנאי בצע יאריך ימים (Prov 28:15–16)

(15) Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people.

(16) A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor; but one who hates unjust gain will enjoy a long life (NRSV).

דור חרבות שניו ומאכלות מתלעתיו לאכל עניים מארץ ואביונים מאדם (Prov 30:14)

There are those whose teeth are swords, whose teeth are knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mortals (NRSV).

As these passages reveal, the sages of Proverbs understand that the misfortunes of the poor are not merely the lack of life-necessary items, such as food and money, but also include the oppressive social system that the powerful can easily manipulate in favor of themselves and at the expense of others, especially the poor. According to Prov 13:23, the sages of Proverbs are aware that the poor remain poor not because they are lazy or foolish but because they are deprived of what they produce. In Prov 22:7 and 28:15–16, the voice of the Father, like Qohelet, also clearly presents the ruling class as the wicked who devour the poor, and their gains are *unjust*. The sages vividly illustrate how oppressive the society can be against the poor who are situated on the bottom of the hierarchical power structure just as the voice of the Victims does. The Father's voice's moral teachings, therefore, contribute to Qohelet's development of sensitivity to the corruption of the powerful and social injustice.

What is more, the sages also recognize how the oppressive power structure of their society even ruin human relationships and social bonds so that the oppressed are left friendless. Qohelet's recognition of the lack of comforter for the poor is, therefore, not solely the influence of the voice of the Victims but of the Father's voice as well. Example passages read:

הון יסיר רעים רבים ודל מרעהו יפרד: (Prov 19:4)

Wealth brings many friends, but the poor are left friendless (NRSV).

כל אח־ירש שנאהו אף כי מרעהו רחקו ממנו מרדף אמרים לא־המה: (Prov 19:7)

If the poor are hated even by their kin, how much more are they shunned by their friends! When they call after them, they are not there (NRSV).⁹⁶

96 In addition to these passages, Prov 14:20 and 18:16 also show the same scenery.

As in the passages from Lamentations, the sages of Proverbs recognize that the poor are individuals isolated and antagonized by others, friendless, and, therefore, without help or comforter. Qohelet's moral consciousness as a sage, who is interpellated by the voice of the Father, is in large part dialogically constructed by the wisdom tradition. Though Qohelet's utterances in Eccl 4:1 and 5:7 reflect the voice of the Victims, those words do not exclusively reflect the voice of the Victims but also the Father's voice. Therefore, we hear these two voices agreeing with each other to an extent, though the voices emerged from different life contexts and experiences.

An ironic aspect of the Father's voice concerning its recognition of power issues is that the voice contradictorily supports the exiting power structure by promoting the idea that God's divine order is properly functioning within the social system. The sages, as the scribal retainers, thus may seem to be put in a position to serve the interests of the ruling class. Nevertheless, they were not themselves the rulers but originally came from the common people who were, according to Gerhard Emmanuel Lenski, basically "expendable" to the rulers.⁹⁷ Therefore, it is not the retainers' sole interest to benefit the ruling class, but, as Lenski writes, to "maximize their [own] rights and privileges" whether or not their actions pose a threat to the rulers.⁹⁸ Thus, scribes, such as Qohelet and the writers of Proverbs, also had their own moral principles, recognized injustice, and criticized social injustice from their own perspectives when possible. The retainers, therefore, should have frequently encountered situations in which what they were required to do went against their own moral standards. Nevertheless, the scribal authors of Proverbs managed to express their criticism against the powerful because they had their own moral consciousnesses that were primarily shaped as common people rather than as associates of the rulers—and also because they were certainly aware that a ruler's retainers were, after all, expendable resources. Though the scribal retainers could not be consistent in their criticism of the power as the victimized could be, they did not remain completely silent about the problems of social inequities. Qohelet's subversive characteristic is, thus, partly a trait of retainers constructed through his dialogic contact with the Father's voice.

Despite the sages' observations of the social inequities attested in the select passages mentioned above, the world that the sages primarily conceptualize in the wisdom tradition is rather a place in which the divine order perfectly maintains God's justice. The Father's voice itself is contradictory in that regard.

97 Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (1966; repr., New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1984), 246.

98 Lenski points out that the military retainer was the subclass that was "most threatening to the political elite" and the rulers had to highly reward those population to maintain their own power and privileges. *Ibid.*, 247.

Even though the Father's voice is not unaware of complex realities that sometimes testify against the workings of the divine order of the world, the Father's voice's main rhetoric to illustrate the world is retribution, which, to an extent, attributes the sufferings of the poor to their own problems, such as their laziness, stupidity, or wickedness. The sages had to cope with their own realities as scribal retainers after all. Qohelet is assumed to be in the same position. He too was a scribal retainer. Unlike those sages, however, Qohelet's concerns of the oppression of the poor and his criticism of the powerful are much more consistent. In this respect, we must consider that, though Qohelet embraces the moral vision of the Father's voice as well, the voice of the Victims more potently constructed Qohelet's moral consciousness, especially his sensitivity to the oppression of the poor.

What is more, considering the social hierarchy of Qohelet's world and his social status as a scribal retainer of the ruling class, we must also notice the significance of Qohelet's utterances before we move on to another voice. Qohelet's consistent critiques of the powerful do not merely show his awareness of the problems of social inequities or his being virtuous person. His speaking for the oppressed should also be understood as a political action that risks his privileges and power. Qohelet is a חכם (a sage), an intellectual elite (Eccl 12:9), but as mentioned, not a ruler. Though there has been a debate over the existence of חכם class or sage class, it can be generally acknowledged that חכם is a broad category that may cover various intellectual professions. They are mainly scribes whose tasks were performed on the basis of literacy along with professional knowledge and skills, for example, "royal counsellors/cabinet ministers," "legal specialists," or "the Torah teachers."⁹⁹ In exchange of their

99 Crenshaw argues for the existence of the sage class from the monarchic time on. See James L. Crenshaw, "Wisdom and Authority: Sapiential Rhetoric and Its Warrants," in *Congress Volume: Vienna, 1980*, ed. John A. Emerton, VTSup (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 10–29. See also Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 24–25; Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1998); Crenshaw, "Education in Ancient Israel," *JBL* 104, no. 4 (1985): 601–15. Joseph Blenkinsopp argues that חכם is an umbrella term that covers a wider range of intellectual elites who are involved with royal tasks such as royal counsellors and cabinet minister. See Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 9–12. Collins also associates sages with scribes, though his discussion concentrates on the teaching function of sages/scribes rather than royal administrative tasks in general. See Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 7–9. Whybray and Weeks argue against the existence of professional sages. See R. N. Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament* (New York: De Gruyter, 1974); Stuart Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

services to the ruling class, the retainer enjoyed limited power and privileges. Qohelet, however, under the dialogic influence of the voice of the Victims, displays his wholehearted empathy with the oppressed, while he dares to accuse the powerful of the existing oppressions in an uncensored fashion. According to Eccl 12:9, Qohelet was a teacher for “people” (העם), “the general public” in Seow’s terms.¹⁰⁰ Ecclesiastes is, as Fox also points out, didactic text for a broad range of people.¹⁰¹ Although Qohelet owed his status as a sage to the ruling class, Qohelet criticized the powerful and even taught the general public much more consistently than others, like the sages of Proverbs. Thus, Qohelet’s accusation of the powerful and empathetic recognition of the ordinary people’s depressing lives are significant. Qohelet’s words are a public announcement for his “people.” His critique of the powerful in addressing the problems of the inequity of the social structure is, thus, best understood as a political action that he performs mainly under the dialogic influence of the voice of the Victims, through which Qohelet boldly stands by the victims of the society.

2.3 *The Apocalyptic Voice*

Qohelet expresses many contradictory ideas throughout Ecclesiastes, but regarding kings and the powerful, he offers coherently tyrannical and unjust images. Even though Qohelet incorporates the voice of the Victims that views the powerful negatively, it does not seem to sufficiently explain how or why a scribal retainer Qohelet, who owes his privileged status to the ruling class, can articulate critical opinions about the ruling class so consistently. As mentioned, the scribal authors of Proverbs or Ben Sira are much more careful in their expressions of criticism against the powerful, and they are also relatively much more positive about their social conditions, at least in their literary expressions. Though retainers had their own moral standards and hold their empathy with the oppressed recognizing the social injustice caused by the powerful, it is also true that retainers’ power and privileges, though limited, were rooted in the existing unjust economic and political structure. Their in-between social positions, therefore, made them hesitate to take a radical and independent stance against the ruling class. Thus, Qohelet’s radical and thoroughly critical language against the rulers, whom Qohelet frequently designates as “kings,” seems to reflect another voice that is less afraid of depicting the powerful and the world negatively.

100 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 384. Fox understands Qohelet as a “public teacher.” Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 161.

101 Fox takes Ecclesiastes as “didactic Wisdom Literature.” Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 5.

2.3.1 Literary Characteristics of the Apocalyptic Voice

This voice, which gives Qohelet propensity to consistently criticize the powerful, is identified with the apocalyptic writers. Some key aspects of the apocalyptic tradition, of course, overlap with the prophetic tradition as the apocalyptic tradition is often believed to stem from the prophetic tradition.¹⁰² Scholars these days do not seem to accept such a sweeping claim that apocalypticism originated from a single literary, intellectual tradition like the prophetic tradition. But some commonalities are still acknowledged: (1) both apocalyptic writers and prophets (especially postexilic ones) are thoroughly critical about the unjust realities and the powerholders; (2) both express eschatological hope through God's mighty intervention; and (3) they share significant linguistic features, which, in Collins's terms, are "mythological language."¹⁰³ Thus, in terms of his critical depictions of the powerful, the voice that Qohelet resonates with may not be exclusively identified with the Apocalyptic voice. Nevertheless, I prefer to associate Qohelet's negative view on the powerful and the world more closely with the Apocalyptic voice than prophets because of some literary features Qohelet and the apocalyptic writers share. As we will see below, apocalyptic writers raise their critical voice against the powerful through special literary techniques, and the author of Ecclesiastes also appropriates similar literary devices for the same purpose.

Unlike prophets, apocalyptic writers regularly use pseudonymity (or anonymity), especially names of famous heroes of the past, to unfold their narratives. For example, the literary setting of 1 Enoch is the time of Enoch in Genesis, the seventh descendant from Adam, but scholars generally recognize that the earliest Enochic texts are dated to the end of the third century BCE.¹⁰⁴ Also, Daniel in the book of Daniel appears to be a wise young

102 According to Paul D. Hanson, the apocalyptic tradition originates from the struggle between visionary party (represented by Isaiah 56–66 and Zechariah 9–14) and hierocratic party (represented by Haggai, Zechariah 1–8, and Ezekiel 40–48). Collins acknowledges the continuity between the apocalyptic tradition and the postexilic prophetic tradition, but for Collins, understanding apocalypticism as a "derivative phenomenon" is "misdirected." See Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 19–25.

103 Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 24.

104 Milik dates the manuscripts of *Astronomical Book* (1 Enoch 72–82), or *Enastra*, found in Cave 4 in Qumran to the end of the third or the beginning of the second century BCE. See Milik, *The Books of Enoch*, 7. According to Collins, the *Animal Apocalypse* (1 Enoch 85–90) alludes the Maccabean revolt that happened in the middle of the second century BCE, but the book presupposes the *Book of the Watchers* (1 Enoch 1–36) at 1 Enoch 86–87, which suggests that the *Book of the Watchers* cannot be dated later than the first half of the

man in Babylonian captivity, but the messages of resistance against the powerful in the book of Daniel actually target Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the second century BCE.

Pseudonymity itself (or anonymity) is, perhaps, not a particularly distinctive feature of apocalyptic literature because it is also a feature of the wisdom texts that often attribute their authorship to Solomon. Also, regarding the complex process of each book's development in the Hebrew Bible, pseudonymity (or anonymity) is rather a common phenomenon in the Hebrew Bible. However, there is a more important aspect about pseudonymity (or anonymity) in apocalyptic literature that we must note: apocalyptic writers use well known ancient heroes to draw on the past in history as symbolic contexts for their parallel present, and they characterize their texts highly fictive. These are the literary features that Ecclesiastes shares with the apocalyptic tradition to which we shall return later again. The name Daniel in the book of Daniel, for example, is a pseudonym not only for the final writer but also for many ancient audiences and readers since they knew the name otherwise. For example, Daniel (or Danel) already appears as a legendary hero for Ezekiel, the prophet of the sixth century BCE, or even as an antediluvian figure in Jubilees.¹⁰⁵ Then, treating Daniel as a wise young man in Babylonian captivity in the book of Daniel manifestly imbues the book with a fictive color. The case of Enoch will probably be the same. Philip Davies points out that the account of Enoch in Gen 5:18–24 stands in the middle or perhaps at the end of the development of Enochic tradition.¹⁰⁶ In other words, ancient readers and audiences likely knew various Enochic traditions that are now lost and unknown to us. When the first audiences and readers encountered Enoch in the earliest apocalyptic texts, such as the Book of Watchers and the Astronomical Book, therefore, the name should have given them an impression that the texts are fictive. Moreover, since pseudonymous works flourished in the Hellenistic period, it does not seem probable that the apocalyptic writers intended to deceive their readers by using those “pen names.” Those writers consciously produced fictive works under pseudonyms for their own purposes.

second century BCE. See Collins, *Seers, Sybils and Sages*, 42. See also Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 7–16.

105 The book of Ezekiel, a product of the early sixth century BCE, recognizes Daniel as an ancient legendary figure along with Noah and Job rather than Ezekiel's contemporary (Ezek 14:14, 20). In Jubilees 4:20, a figure “Danel,” probably a part of Daniel traditions, is also an ancient legendary hero before the Flood.

106 Davies, “Apocalyptic,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, ed. J. W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 402.

It is difficult to know precisely why the apocalyptic tradition, as a resistance discourse, hides the writers' real identities and draw on the past in history as symbolic contexts for their parallel present to raise their voice. But the way apocalyptic writers utilize pseudonymity (or anonymity) is certainly an intriguing literary technique with rich implications, which will also help us appreciate the name Qohelet in Ecclesiastes. For Paul D. Hanson, this literary technique is perhaps a way of encoding the writers' messages of protests and resistance "for fear of retaliation by the authorities."¹⁰⁷ Such a strategy is what James C. Scott would call "hidden transcripts," which is a "discourse that takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation by powerholders."¹⁰⁸ As Collins argues, however, "some apocalyptic writers would in any case have welcomed martyrdom."¹⁰⁹ Thus, though I would not fully deny the function of self-protection in pseudonymity or anonymity in apocalyptic texts, the apocalyptic style cannot be explained merely as a "hidden transcript." Perhaps, the writers just tried to magnify the authority of their texts ascribing them to revered names of the past like most biblical books. Yet, there is another interesting interpretation. For Anthea E. Portier-Young, the primary function of pseudonymity or anonymity in apocalyptic texts is to disable the autonomy of powerholders and their imperial discourse and to create or define the realities as the apocalyptic writers' own world, by transporting the realities to "an alternative source of power and alternative vision of reality" of which the writers are fully in charge.¹¹⁰ To this extent, the use of pseudonymity or anonymity along with alternative realities in apocalyptic texts can be an art of rhetoric for *active* resistance.

As for Ecclesiastes, the author introduces Qohelet as a king of Jerusalem over Israel and a son of David (1:1). This statement apparently intends to make the reader imagine the name Solomon and establishes the setting of the book in the remote past, the tenth century BCE, but the text's actual context is, as discussed in chapter three, far from Israel's monarchic period. This literary feature might just be a sign of the wisdom tradition. However, the text, unlike other wisdom books that explicitly attribute the authorship to Solomon, intentionally avoids using the name Solomon but calls the main speaker "Qohelet" and "wise one" (חכם) who taught people. Qohelet strangely assumes two incompatible roles, mainly the role of the wisdom teacher, but firstly that of

¹⁰⁷ Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 252.

¹⁰⁸ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 4.

¹⁰⁹ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 39.

¹¹⁰ Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 41–43.

Solomon. Ecclesiastes hides the real identity of the author and makes the main speaker Qohelet mysterious and fictive as apocalyptic writers often do. As discussed, the use of pseudonymity/anonymity and setting its context in the distant past can be a way of protecting the author from the surveillance and the retaliation of the local and foreign rulers of the postexilic era as Hanson points out. But our writer's adoption of the apocalyptic literary techniques, especially creating an alternative reality in which the powerholders can never be in control of the world might also have been the author's tool to actively seek resistance against the powerful as Portier-Young argues. Through the core literary techniques of apocalyptic writers, the author of Ecclesiastes designs Qohelet as a King-Solomon-like wisdom teacher, an ancient hero but a mysterious and fictive character. Born in an alternative reality and equipped with the Apocalyptic voice, Qohelet considers the world to be totally corrupted as is in apocalyptic literature and consistently exposes the condition of the world as a means of criticizing the powerful. Therefore, Qohelet's consistent critique of the powerful and the world is more closely associated with the Apocalyptic voice than prophets.

2.3.2 Qohelet's Dialogic Conflicts with the Apocalyptic Voice

Qohelet, therefore, is a character who, at least in part, positively responds to the Apocalyptic voice's critical point of view on the powerful and the world. The character Qohelet in Ecclesiastes is, nonetheless, far from human agents in apocalyptic literature, such as Enoch, Daniel, and Ezra. In fact, Qohelet critically reviews most assertions that apocalyptic writers make. Of course, even such aspects of Qohelet do not deny his partial embracement of the Apocalyptic voice but rather suggest his active and serious dialogic engagement with the Apocalyptic voice.

One of the elements in apocalyptic literature that Qohelet challenges is the apocalyptic view of the world and cosmos. The case of 1 Enoch provides a good example. Particularly in the Book of Watchers (1–36) and the Book of Dream Visions (83–90), Enoch the human agent of apocalypses, functioning as a mediator between God and humans, reveals heavenly secrets to the reader that he receives through his journey to heaven and dreams, but Qohelet denies the possibility of journey to the heavenly realm and the function of dream as a means of revelation.¹¹¹ For example, in Eccl 5:1b, Qohelet says: האלהים בשמים ואתה על-הארץ עלי-כן יהיו דבריך מעטים (God is in heaven but you are on earth.

111 Also in 39:3 in the Book of Parables, the reader is told that Enoch was snatched up by a whirlwind to heaven. See George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 52.

Therefore, let your words be few). Though the main idea of this utterance is to warn careless talkativeness before God, it clearly discloses Qohelet's assumption about the chasm between human and God's realms. To admonish his readers and audiences on the matter of proper attitudes towards God, Qohelet appeals to God's venerability, which lies in the strict distinction between God's place in heaven and human place on earth. For Qohelet whose subjectivity is primarily formed by the Father's voice and the voice of Rational Intellect, the idea that the transcendent and earthly realms can be mediated by heavenly journeys of chosen ones or their dreams is something bizarre or totally unverifiable.

In terms of Qohelet's denial of the function of "dreams" as a means of revelation, the passages in Eccl 5:2 and 6 are noteworthy. Qohelet in v. 2 states: *כי בא החלום ברב ענין וקול כסיל ברב דברים* (for the dream comes with abundance of task and the voice of fool with abundance of words); and again, in v. 6, he states: *כי ברב חלמות והבלים ודברים הרבה כי אתהאלהים ירא* (Surely, absurdities are with abundance of dreams and many words; surely, fear God). These verses belong to the unit, Eccl 4:17–5:6, which, as intimated, talks about careless talkativeness before God, but it is highly ambiguous how or why Qohelet relates the word "dream" to this theme.¹¹² At any rate, his usage of the word, dream, surely has negative connotations since "the task" (*ענין*) that Qohelet believes to accompany the dream (*החלום*) abundantly is always a kind of business that makes human life unhappy, ephemeral, or vain.¹¹³ Moreover, Eccl 5:6 irrevocably asserts that "dreams," for Qohelet, is something absurd. For Seow also, "the significance of 'dream' here approximates *hebel*—it is something ephemeral and unreliable."¹¹⁴ Since human life experiences, for Qohelet, are strictly limited to the earthly realm, "dream" should also be purely an earthly phenomenon that does not have a religious value that apocalyptic writers impose on the word. By comparing (not contrasting) dream with talkativeness and equating it with absurdity in the context where he is talking about religious duties

112 According to Ruth Fidler, Jacob's dream narrative at *בית אלהים* (the house of God or Bethel) and his "partial and belated fulfillment of his vow" and Solomon's dream in *הבמה הגדולה* (the great place) in Gibeon where he offered great offerings should be understood as the background of Qohelet's speeches in the passage 4:17–5:6. See Fidler, "Qoheleth in 'the House of God': Text and Intertext in Qoh 4:17–5:6 (Eng. 5:1–7)," *HS* 47 (2006): 7–21. Cf. Gen 28:10–22; 31:13; 35:1, 7, 14; 1 Kgs 3. While the details of his argument may not be fully compelling, we should note that his insight about the dream's function that mediates the heavenly realm and the human realm in *בית אלהים* (the house of God) and *הבמה הגדולה* (the great place as a shrine) in both narratives as a background of Qohelet's speeches are noteworthy.

113 The word *ענין* appears only in Ecclesiastes. See Eccl 1:13; 2:23, 26; 3:10; 4:8; 5:13; and 8:16.

114 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 200.

and proper attitudes toward God, Qohelet quite seriously discredits the value of dream that is often treated as a medium of God's revelation in the apocalyptic tradition. Admittedly, Qohelet's dispute with the Apocalyptic voice is only implicit here. However, we must consider that Qohelet could have given his admonition about careless talkativeness in a much more straightforward and conventional manner as in Prov 10:19. But he uses this unnecessary word "dream," which is not even understood intuitively in the context to make his point. Unless the word "dream" in Eccl 5:2 and 6 is just an accidentally chosen word, which is without significant theological implications, therefore, Qohelet intentionally uses the language of the apocalyptic tradition with a clear intention of disputing with the idea about the function of dreams in apocalyptic literature.

Another apocalyptic element that Qohelet denies is the existence of the afterlife. Again, 1 Enoch is an exemplary text. Enoch's cosmos, according to 1 Enoch 39:4–8, provides the righteous or the chosen with the eternal dwellings to rest, but Qohelet, as an intellectual elite of the Hellenistic cultural milieu in which rationality is increasingly valued, resolutely rejects the afterlife. For Qohelet, human life and death are clearly confined to the earthly realm as he constantly emphasizes that all human life experiences happen "under the sun."¹¹⁵ Moreover, the so-called "same fate" of animals and humans over which Qohelet laments in Eccl 3:19, also suggests that there is no chosen one to mediate between God and humans, not to mention his disbelief about the afterlife (3:18, 21).¹¹⁶

What is more, an important rhetoric that Enoch in 1 Enoch uses to reveal heavenly secrets obtained through his heavenly tour is the expression "I saw" (1 Enoch 39:7; 40:1, 2; 41:1, 2; 41:3, 4, 5, 7; 43:1; 2; 44:1).¹¹⁷ Qohelet also uses the rhetoric, "I saw" (ראיתי or אראה), twenty times, frequently with the expression תחת השמש (under the sun). For example, in Eccl 1:14, Qohelet says: "ראיתי את-כל-המעשים שנעשו תחת השמש והנה הכל הבל ורעות רוח" (I saw all the works that have been done under the sun; and lo, all is absurd and a pursuit of wind). Considering the fact that all human utterances emerge in response to what has been already spoken in the world's "dialogic fabrics,"¹¹⁸ Qohelet's repetitive

¹¹⁵ For example, in Eccl 1:3, 9, 14; 2:11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22.

¹¹⁶ The translation of the verse is controversial. One of possible renderings, which I follow, is Seow's translation: "I said in my heart, 'as regards human beings, surely God has chosen them < > to show that they are animals < > themselves.'" See Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 159, 167–68.

¹¹⁷ Cf. "the vision of wisdom that Enoch saw" (37:1); "my eyes saw" (39:13); "my eyes beheld" (41:3); "the Lord of Spirits has shown you" (43:4). See Nickelsburg and VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation*.

¹¹⁸ See n. 71. above.

expression, “I saw ... under the sun,” at least implicitly disputes with one of the major traits of apocalyptic literature that the human agents of apocalypses *see* visions frequently *in the heavenly realm*. From a Bakhtinian perspective, it does not seem accidental that Qohelet, a rational thinker, happens to deny what has been spoken by the Apocalyptic voice of his time.

2.3.3 Qohelet's Partial Embrace of the Apocalyptic Voice

Despite Qohelet's overall negative response to the Apocalyptic voice, his recognition of social injustice shares commonalities with the voice especially with respect to his consistently negative depictions of the powerful. For example, the Animal Apocalypse in the second dream vision in 1 Enoch shows us two totally corrupted entities, the world and the cult, which must be overturned by God. As Tiller interprets, “demonic” power—which is an “other-worldly” power comparable with the fallen Watchers—is behind the Seleucid Empire, corrupting the world; and the “polluted” or “not pure” temple-state of Judea also is corrupting the cult.¹¹⁹ According to Weinfeld, the king is the guardian of social justice not just in the context of Jewish society but throughout the ancient Near East.¹²⁰ Like the Apocalyptic voice, however, the images of the king that Qohelet offers are far from the basic notion of the king. For example, in Eccl 4:13, Qohelet compares a foolish old king, a symbolic figure of the ruling class of his time, with a poor wise youth. As Fox points out, an old person is normally respected for his or her wealth of wisdom in the ancient Near East cultures, but this king, despite his old age, is “כסיל” (foolish).¹²¹ Moreover, this foolish old king is contrasted with a poor wise young man. As in Dan 5 in which Daniel's wisdom is contrasted with the foolishness of King Belshazzar, Qohelet in Eccl 4:13 mocks the powerful in a similar fashion. Moreover, Qohelet here also implies that the wise youth will soon replace the foolish old king. In other words, the powerholders no longer enjoy their power to control people as Qohelet in his alternative reality disables the autonomy of the powerholders and their imperial discourse.

The passage in Eccl 10:4–5 can be understood in a similar vein. In this passage, Qohelet presents to us an erroneous and angry ruler who becomes a source of רעה (misfortune or perhaps evil) for others.¹²² The passage reads as follows:

119 Tiller, “Israel at the Mercy of Demonic Powers,” 113–21.

120 Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, North American ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 45–48.

121 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 224–25.

122 Qohelet reveals that hasty anger is a trait of foolishness. See Eccl 7:9.

- (4) אִמְרוּחַ הַמוֹשֵׁל תַּעֲלֶה עֲלֶיךָ מִקוֹמְךָ אֶל־תִּנַּח כִּי מִרְפָּא יִנַּח חֲטָאִים גְּדוֹלִים
 (5) יֵשׁ רָעָה רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּשְׂגָגָה¹²³ שִׁיצָא מִלִּפְנֵי הַשִּׁלִּיט (Eccl 10:4–5)

(4) If the anger of the ruler arises against you, do not leave your post, for calmness will undo great offenses

(5) There is a misfortune that I have seen under the sun, an error that comes from the ruler. (NRSV with my modifications)

In the passage, this tyrannic ruler's anger is described to be חֲטָאִים גְּדוֹלִים (great offenses), and Qohelet advises the subordinate to be calm so that the anger can be deflated.¹²⁴ This tyrannic ruler is also a person of שְׂגָגָה (unintentional error), an erroneous ruler. Qohelet reveals that the subordinates' calmness may deflate the ruler's absurd anger, but they cannot prevent the misfortunes that the ruler's errors will bring to them. What is particularly notable here is the term שְׂגָגָה, because Qohelet also uses this word in Eccl 5:5 where he discusses "careless sinner," a type of person who provokes God's anger and punishment that destroys all his or her achievements. The God in Eccl 5:5 is reminiscent of the God in the prophetic and apocalyptic traditions in which God certainly punishes sinners when time is ripened. In light of Eccl 5:5, the passage in Eccl 10:4–5 eventually leads the reader to a chain of logic that the ruler's שְׂגָגָה, which is a source of misfortune for others, especially the subordinates, can also provoke God's anger and punishment. Qohelet's main intention here in Eccl 10:4–5 is maybe to offer a piece of advice on wise behaviors for an absurd ruler's subordinates, but, if his utterance in Eccl 5:5 is taken into account, especially the way Qohelet uses the word שְׂגָגָה, this advice has an interesting satirical overtone about this ruler of שְׂגָגָה that Qohelet creates.

Ironically, Qohelet also introduces himself as a king, which is a figure that he depicts as a symbol of the ultimate source of social injustice in the passages discussed above. But the account about Qohelet's kingship in Ecclesiastes too is, as will be demonstrated, not merely for the legitimacy and greatness of his kingship but also for offering criticism of the powerful. Though the name Solomon does not appear, the text apparently implies that Qohelet plays the role of King Solomon especially in the so-called "royal fiction" (Eccl 1:12–2:26). As well known, Qohelet, like Solomon, was allegedly wiser than all before himself (Eccl 1:16), accumulated significant wealth (Eccl 2:7–9), and executed many great building projects. The portrayal of Qohelet parallels that of

¹²³ The preposition כִּי in כִּשְׂגָגָה is taken as a pleonasm or "*Kaph veritatis*." See GKC §118.x.

¹²⁴ According to Fox, the term מִרְפָּא (calmness) is "soothing ability" to pacify his superior." Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 304.

Solomon in the book of Kings: 1 Kgs 5:1–8 and 10:14–29 (wealth); 5:9–14 (wisdom); 5:15–32 (building projects).¹²⁵ The protagonists' greatness is probably these texts' surface-level meaning. As Sandoval argues, however, Solomon's wealth and building projects 1 Kgs 1–11 also subtly offer critiques of royal figures since the portrayal of Solomon is strikingly similar to oppressive imperial figures like Pharaohs.¹²⁶ The critiques of Solomon in First Kings become more explicit in the following chapter that deals the events after Solomon's death. In 1 Kgs 12:1–20, for example, Solomon's counselors advise Rehoboam to lighten the people's "yoke" (יָג) that his father Solomon made heavy. As Rehoboam rejects this "good" advice and expresses his plans that are even more tyrannical than Solomon's, the nation is split into two kingdoms. The text tells us that Solomon's splendid building projects are not only a symbol of the greatness of his kingdom but also the foundational factor that makes people turn their back on the Davidic lineage and severs the nation into two. Thus, Sandoval argues that the images of Qohelet in the royal fiction that evidently recall Pharaoh-like Solomon in First Kings also offer satiric critiques of the imperial figures of its own time.¹²⁷ In this respect, Qohelet's autobiographic account in the royal fiction is a self-derogatory satire that aims at the powerful. Under the dialogic influence of the Apocalyptic voice, Qohelet perceives the world as a place in which the powerful are oppressive and the corruption is pervasive. In that regard, Qohelet is consistent throughout the text and even dares to wear a mask of King Solomon to convey his criticism of the powerful.

Qohelet's self-introduction in the royal fiction is, then, a satiric way to criticize the powerful. But as mentioned, it also is Qohelet's self-derogatory account about his power and privileges in an apocalyptic age. Like Daniel and his three friends in Babylonian captivity, Qohelet had to confront an ironic life. Whether or not it is the young men's intention, the wisdom appropriated in their political positions necessarily collaborates with the empire's oppressive and unjust propaganda. As Danna Nolan Fewell aptly describes, we find the "double life" in Daniel and his friends.¹²⁸ Just as the young men both undermine and con-

125 The verse numbers follow BHS.

126 Sandoval notes that, despite the harsh ruler images of Solomon in 1 Kgs 1–11, the deuteronomistic materials, such as 3:3–15; 6:11–13; 8:14–61; 9:1–9; and 11:1–13, 33–39, nonetheless, praise Solomon. See Timothy J. Sandoval, "Reconfiguring Solomon in the Royal Fiction of Ecclesiastes," in *On Prophets, Warriors, and Kings: Former Prophets Through the Eyes of Their Interpreters*, ed. George J. Brooke and Ariel Feldman, BZAW 470 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 13–39.

127 Ibid.

128 Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 123. Fewell's use of "the double life" describes both resistance and conformity to the empire as hidden and public transcripts respectively. However, as I

struct the empire's world, Qohelet also has to "wisely" cope with the reality of an apocalyptic age and maintains his limited power and privileges rather than just violently revolts and dies. Qohelet's royal-fiction satire, thus, completes his criticism against the powerful, and behind this completeness, there lies the Apocalyptic voice. Even though Qohelet's dialogic contact with this voice did not turn him into a member of a millennial group, it fully influenced his view on social justice.

2.4 *God and Justice for Qohelet*

In the construction of Qohelet's perspective on social justice, his dialogic contact with the voice of the Victims and the Apocalyptic voice was a decisive factor. Through the justice discourses of these two voices and perhaps some other voices, Qohelet realizes how oppressive the world is for the victimized in his society and notices that corrupted power is one of the crucial sources of absurd and unjust happenings in the world. The fact that benevolent aspects of the powerful in Qohelet's perceived world are almost completely absent suggests how significantly these voices influenced on the shaping of Qohelet's understanding of the world.¹²⁹ Despite many contradictions in Ecclesiastes, Qohelet's reports on injustice practiced in his society are noticeably coherent.

As Qohelet reflects on the corrupted condition of the world theologically, however, he begins contradicting himself again since the conflicting two voices—the Father's voice and the voice of Rational Intellect—are also major parts of Qohelet's justice discourse. As a sage, Qohelet acknowledges God's retribution and even God's intervention. In Eccl 3:17, for example, Qohelet claims that when God's time arrives, God will bring justice to all, both the righteous and the wicked, according to their characters or actions.¹³⁰ Also in Eccl 8:12b–13,

discussed drawing on Portier-Young's argument, apocalyptic resistance in Daniel is not purely "hidden transcript" but also an explicit artistic expression of resistance. Cf. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 226–29.

129 A possible exception might be Eccl 5:8: "ויתרון ארץ בכל היא מלך לשדה נעבד." But its exact meaning is quite ambiguous. As Seow also points out, "the whole verse as it stands is problematic because of the awkwardness of its syntax." Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 204. For Fox, v. 8b does not make sense without an emendation. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 234. According to Crenshaw, the verse can be literally rendered as "And an advantage of a land in everything is this—a king for a field that is being worked." See Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 115. The passage is often understood as if the king in this verse allows agriculture to benefit people, but, contrarily, it can also be understood as if the land is cultivated ultimately for the king.

130 The expression "את־הצדיק ואת־הרשע ישפט האלהים" may be rendered as "God will judge the righteous and the wicked," but this translation obscures the use of the verb שפט in this context as the word "to judge" often indicates "to punish." Thus, "to bring justice" might be a better way to translate the sentence. Cf. Isa 11:4; Ps 72:4; Prov 29:4.

Qohelet again makes his assertion about God's justice: the wise live long, and those who fear God will prosper.¹³¹ Qohelet's words here clearly resonate with the Father's voice, which also asserts that the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and wisdom brings many blessings, especially long life. For example, Prov 9:10a says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and Prov 10:45 says, "The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short."¹³² Qohelet in Eccl 8:12b–13 recreates the teachings of the Father's voice about God's justice using one of the most prominent rhetorical features of the wisdom tradition. As shown above, "the fear of the Lord" is the foundation of wisdom, and security and prosperity as wisdom's benefits are, of course, what God gives to the wise in God's way to establish justice in the world.¹³³ Under the dialogic influence of the Father's voice, Qohelet in 8:12b–13 affirms wisdom's consequences that are favorable to the subject of wise actions, and what this suggests is that God's divine order that maintains the world in justice is working properly.

Qohelet, as a rational intellectual character, however, also challenges God's justice as he frequently observes and experiences inexcusable "anomalies" in realities that disturb God's justice. One of the reasons that Qohelet is characterized as a skeptic is, in fact, his doubts about God's justice. Though we just saw that Qohelet in Eccl 8:12b–13 affirms God's justice like one of the sages of Proverbs, Qohelet, according to Eccl 7:15, also confidently claims that he saw (ראיתי) that there are the righteous who perish (צדיק אבד) and the wicked who prolong their life (רשע מאריך). The sentence, arguably, does not specify when and how the righteous perish or what the wicked prolong. What is obviously implied, however, is that Qohelet notices the righteous do not seem to prolong their lives as assured by the Father's voice, and the wicked do not seem to perish but rather live quite long unexpectedly.¹³⁴ Moreover, in Eccl 8:10–12a and

131 The wise and the one who fears God in 8:12 can generally be understood as a righteous one, and this understanding is evident considering the fact that the wise and the one who fears God here are a character contrasted with an opposite character, חטא עשה רע מאד (a sinner who does hundreds of evil).

132 See also: Prov. 9:10–11; 14:26–27; 19:23; 22:4; 29:25.

133 In von Rad's terms, this "fear" is "prerequisite" of all wisdom, taken in the "sense of beginning." Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (London: SCM Press, 1972; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1993), 66–67. Fox in a similar vein also states that "the fear of the Lord" in Proverbs is "the motto" of the book, and, as a religious virtue, it has "a temporal priority," and it is "prerequisite" of all wisdom. Fox, *Proverbs* 1–9, 67–71.

134 The verb ארך (to be long) in hiphil normally appears with ימים (days) to express "to prolong days," that is "to lengthen life span," but, in Eccl 7:15, ימים is omitted. However, the term אבד (to perish), which is contrasted with ארך, sufficiently suggests that the context

14, Qohelet states that sometimes the wicked have blessed lives and the righteous have cursed lives. Qohelet observes that the righteous experience what the wicked deserve, and the wicked experience what the righteous deserve. Qohelet's observations completely contradict his own proclamations about God's justice.

3 Qohelet's Dialogized Interior Monologue

Qohelet's wisdom discourse in which justice is a significant thematic part is composed of, at least, the four voices discussed above. Since the level of these voices' dialogic influence on Qohelet varies when he speaks, Qohelet exhibits a range of characteristics, from very traditional sage characteristics to quite rational characteristics. In Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue, he truly incorporates these consciousnesses as independent voices. They are, in Bakhtin's terms, not "voiceless slaves" but "free people," each capable of engaging in dialogues "with equal rights" and "with its own world."¹³⁵ These voices carry their own beliefs, experiences, observations, questions, and answers, and Qohelet's contradictions are a "dialogic collision"¹³⁶ of those conflicting voices in his utterances. While Qohelet sometimes more clearly speaks like the "father" in Proverbs or a rational thinker, such a distinction is sometimes not clear because both voices have influence on Qohelet simultaneously, even though, as I will demonstrate, one voice usually affects Qohelet's speeches at least a little stronger than the other.

We must note, however, that Qohelet does not suffer from multiple personality disorder. The speaking subject in Ecclesiastes is always Qohelet, neither purely a sage nor purely a rational thinker; neither one of the victimized nor a member of a millennial group. He just appears to be sometimes a more rational character or a more traditional sage character. The conflicting voices always coexist and interpenetrate each other in Qohelet's consciousness authoring Qohelet's identity unfinalizably. Thus, Qohelet's sage-like utterances, mainly under the dialogic influence of the Father's voice, are always ironically voiced with his rational consciousness, and vice versa. As Bakhtin would say, Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue is always double-voiced. The voices

of 7:15 is about longevity of the righteous and the wicked. In Deut 30:13, "to perish" is restated in another expression "not to live long."

¹³⁵ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 6.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

interpenetrate each other in Qohelet's consciousness without clear boundaries. In Bakhtin's term, the rational Qohelet is the sage Qohelet's "own double" and his "alter ego,"¹³⁷ not another personality. Since we analytically reanimated and overheard those voices in this chapter, we now have to turn to Qohelet's actual speeches, his dialogized interior monologue, to see the voices' dialogues and interpenetration in Qohelet's consciousness.

¹³⁷ See chap. 2, p. 26, n. 32.

Qohelet's Dialogized Interior Monologue on Wisdom

We saw that the modernist approaches to the contradictions in the book resulted in the polarization of scholars' views on Qohelet's identity and the messages of his words, because those approaches reduce what is genuinely complex and contradictory into something coherent. Thus, drawing on Bakhtin's literary, philosophical insights, I demonstrated how multiple dialogic voices constructed Qohelet's consciousness to insist that his contradictions are best understood as a dialogized interior monologue. To identify and understand the dialogic voices, we explored a larger discursive background of Qohelet's world and then reanimated four voices that most significantly shaped Qohelet's complex consciousness, his identity, and his contradictory words. Finally in this chapter, we turn to the last task, that is, observing Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue.

To overhear Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue, we first need to recognize specific contradictions in Qohelet's words, since he expresses contradictions as multiple voices construct his consciousness. As discussed, however, his contradictions can be variously identified and categorized based on the reader's perspective. There cannot be a definite solution to this task. Nevertheless, one area where a strong contradiction arises for many is Qohelet's discourse of wisdom's benefits. Three topics can be discussed under this category, and the first topic is about wisdom's actual power to produce beneficial consequences. Just like the "father" in the patriarchal didactic wisdom texts such as Proverbs and Ben Sira, Qohelet sometimes claims that wise actions result in certain positive consequences that benefit the wise and others. But can wisdom really bring beneficial consequences? This is the question about which Qohelet speculates very deeply and utter contradictory words. Qohelet, as a rational thinker, is not fully yoked to traditional didactic wisdom and so utters that wise and virtuous actions sometimes fail to produce positive consequences. Thus, the rational Qohelet polemicizes about the rhetoric of retribution that the Father's voice deploys to connect wisdom or wise actions with certain positive life events as wisdom's consequences. The rational Qohelet claims that world events may happen arbitrarily rather than strictly according to the divine order.

In a similar vein, the sage Qohelet advocates the idea that wisdom is ultimately and fundamentally superior over folly. This is the second topic in the discourse of wisdom's benefits about which Qohelet contradictorily speaks.

As will be demonstrated, for the sage Qohelet, wisdom is light, the right path of life, and the side of God. But Qohelet also frustratingly realizes the powerlessness of wisdom before the fate that happens to all regardless of one's wisdom and righteousness. Is wisdom really the ultimate benefit in an absurd world? Qohelet wonders. This is a more fundamental question about wisdom's benefits to which Qohelet contradictorily answers. Qohelet's words are, again dialogized by contradicting voices.

The last topic in Qohelet's discourse of wisdom's benefits is about the worth of wisdom itself. As mentioned, the Father's voice does not simplistically advertise the practical advantages of wisdom. This voice promotes an idea that wisdom is something that is worth pursuing regardless of its consequences. The sage Qohelet aptly grasps this full range of the Father's teaching and recognizes both wisdom's penultimate benefits as well as the idea that wisdom is itself its greatest reward. As mentioned, a virtuous life is the ultimate purpose of the way of wisdom, not its material rewards that make the wise happy. But as Qohelet incorporates Hellenistic philosophical discourses that prioritize individual happiness or pleasure over everything, including a virtuous life and even wisdom itself, he also expresses his skepticism about the idea that wisdom is something worth pursuing at any cost. The rational Qohelet questions the validity of the ideological claim of the Father's voice. Therefore, Qohelet's wisdom discourse is not just another patriarchal didactic wisdom text that mainly reinforces the teachings of the Father's voice. Due to Qohelet's responses to multiple interpellations, Qohelet's wisdom discourse is internally dialogized by the conflicting voices that both reinforce and undermine the teachings of the Father's voice. The contradictions, thus, emerge.

Rooted in the discourse of wisdom's benefits, there emerges another contradiction significant to Qohelet's broader wisdom discourse: wisdom's accessibility. As a sage whose identity is formed in patriarchal didactic wisdom, Qohelet sometimes presupposes that wisdom is accessible. Qohelet does not explicitly claim the accessibility of wisdom, but we can still imagine his presupposition about wisdom's accessibility. Otherwise, he essentially cannot affirm the benefits of wisdom. On the other hand, he also at points explicitly denies wisdom's accessibility. As will be demonstrated and discussed, Qohelet describes his "wisdom" or intellectual exploration as "contrivance" (חשבנות), something deviated from true "wisdom." In defense of God's justice and divine order embedded in the world, the sage Qohelet claims that humans do not have access to true wisdom, and therefore, they cannot observe the divine order even though it is properly working. Qohelet attributes the absurdity of the world events that he observes to humans' lack of true wisdom. From a Bakhtinian perspective, all these contradictions can arise in Qohelet's single

consciousness as he encounters contradicting voices, embraces them, and resonates with them simultaneously in his dialogized interior monologue.

1 Can Wisdom Bring Beneficial Consequences?

A dialogized interior monologue of Qohelet, which we will first discuss here, is his contradictory reflections on wisdom's benefits. Qohelet is often called a skeptic because his words exhibit doubts about some patriarchal didactic wisdom teachings. As we will see, however, we can also find many passages in which Qohelet affirms such teachings. Multiple dialogic voices interact with one another in Qohelet's consciousness generating contradictions regarding the benefit of wisdom. To hear his dialogized interior monologue on this matter, let's first notice his affirmation of the Father's voice.

One of the primary teachings that Qohelet embraces from the Father's voice is wisdom's benefits. Though we should not take the wisdom words of the Father's voice too literally, what the addressee of the Father's voice—the "Son" (בן)—can still primarily learn from the Father's voice is apparently the fact that wise actions should result in beneficial consequences. For example, in Eccl 10:12–13, Qohelet resonates with the Father's wisdom words and affirms the divine order and wisdom's beneficial consequences by connecting wisdom and foolishness with favorable and disastrous consequences respectively.

(12) דברי פִּי־חכם חן ושפתות כסיל תבלענו

(13) תחלת דברי־פִּיהו סבלות ואחרית פִּיהו הוללות רעה¹ (Eccl 10:12–13)

(12) Words spoken by the wise bring them favor, but the lips of fools consume them.

(13) The words of their mouths begin in foolishness, and their talk ends in disastrous madness. (NRSV with my modifications)

1 The term רעה is a feminine form of the adjective רע. This is one of the words that are used in a variety of ways often without a clear context in Ecclesiastes. Though "evil" is a common rendering of the term רע in many biblical passages, "evil" is not suitable for most contexts in Ecclesiastes. Rather, the term רע is more often used as "worth little," "unhappy," or "unfortunate" in Ecclesiastes, and is not always related to negative moral or religious judgment. The use of רע in Eccl 10:13, however, can perhaps be understood as "evil," since the consequence of folly or foolish words could be "evil" whether intended or not. However, "evil" seems to be too strong a word to describe a consequence of unintentional foolish behaviors, especially if the fool is the one who is affected by the consequence. Since the negative outcomes of one's folly discussed in Eccl 10:12–13 are mainly about how they engulf the fool, the term רעה can be translated as "disastrous."

Qohelet here as a sage claims that wisdom will bring “favor” or “grace” (חן) as the Father’s voice in Prov 3:21–22 teaches that wisdom (חכמה) is equal to “grace” (חן), which becomes like a gracious adornment to one’s neck. Verse 12a “Words spoken by the wise bring them favor” can literally be “the words of a wise one’s mouth is favor.” It is unclear whether the text means that wise words bring favor (חן) or the quality of wise words is itself gracious (חן). Since the latter half of v. 12a is about adverse consequences of foolish words, the context qualifies the former as a more suitable understanding; that is, the “favor” or “grace” indicates the consequence of wise words. Proverbs, however, has passages comparable with both understandings: the first with Prov 10:21, 32; 15:2, 7 along with 3:21–22; the latter with Prov 8:35. Whichever is the case, therefore, Qohelet in these verses resonates with the Father’s voice.

Also in Eccl 8:1b–6a, Qohelet expresses the same idea by stating that every matter has its timely judgment, and the wise know it.² Though Qohelet in the following verses (vv. 6b–7) contradicts himself by denying wisdom’s power, he returns to his initial thought again in v. 8 that God’s timely judgment will eventually come and the wise will prevail. The passages read as follows:

- (1b) חכמת אדם תאיר פניו ועז פניו ישנא
 (2) אני³ פיימלך שמור ועל דברת שבועת אלהים
 (3) אלתבהל מפניו תלך⁴ אלתעמד בדבר רע כי כל־אשר יחפץ יעשה
 (4) באשר דבר־מלך שלטון⁵ ומי יאמר־לו מה־תעשה

2 Also Eccl 8:12b–13 reveals a similar idea; that is, Qohelet’s embrace of the Father’s voice that utilizes the rhetoric of wisdom-prosperity axiom to promote wisdom’s way.

3 אני here does not make sense as it stands. BHS suggests to emend as אנת. For other possible emendations or interpretations of the verse, see Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 150.

4 תלך is here understood as “to follow” as in 1 Kgs 18:21; Jer 2:2; Hos 1:2; and 2:7. The term הלך is often combined with אחר to express “to follow after,” but when used in imperative with the force of “to follow” as in this case, objective of the verb can be omitted as attested in Hos 1:2.

5 The meaning of the term שלט, a root of שלטון, has been much debated by scholars, especially between Seow and Dominic Rudman. Seow argues that שלט in Ecclesiastes means “to have right of disposal” or the authority in economic and legal senses. According to Seow, such a meaning only used until the Persian period, but, later, that meaning discontinues, and the word became to mean “to rule” or “to overpower” in a more general sense or perhaps in political sense. For Seow, the use of שלט and its derivatives in Ecclesiastes are quite critical factors to date Ecclesiastes to the Persian period. However, Rudman rejects Seow’s thesis and argues that שלט as “to have right of disposal” is well attested in documents composed in the Hellenistic period. For example, in Dan 2:38, the word is used to indicate authority in economic sense. Seow’s restriction of the usage of שלט in legal-economic senses is difficult to maintain due to the unclear boundary between simple power and legal-economic right of disposal. However, what Rudman tries to demonstrate to reject Seow’s thesis is not without a problem. For example, though he argues that שלט in Dan 2:38 is used to mean “to have right

(5) שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע ועת ומשפט⁶ ידע לב חכם

(6a) כי לכל־חפץ יש עת ומשפט

(6b) בִּירַעַת האדם רבה עליו

(7) כִּי־אֵינָנו ידע מִה־שִׁיחִיה כי כאשר⁷ יהיה מי יגיד לו

(8) אין אדם שליט ברוח לכלוא את־הרוח ואין שלטון ביום המות ואין משלחת

במלחמה ולא־ימלט רשע את־בעליו (Eccl 8:1b–8)

(1b) Wisdom makes one's face shine, and the hardness of one's countenance is changed.

(2) Keep the king's command because of your sacred oath.⁸

(3) Do not be terrified at his presence; obey; do not just stay standing when the matter is unpleasant, for he does whatever he pleases.

(4) For the word of the king is powerful, and who can say to him "What are you doing?"

(5) Whoever obeys the king's commandment will meet no harm, and the wise mind knows timely judgment,

(6a) for every matter has its timely judgment.

of disposal," it can also mean "to rule" or "to overpower" in its context. See Seow, "Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qohelet," 643–66; Dominic Rudman, "A Note on the Dating of Ecclesiastes," *CBQ* 61, no. 1 (1999): 47–52. In Eccl 8:4, שליט is "authority" or "power" in legal-economic senses but not exclusively so.

6 While the text literally reads "time and judgment," some Mss do not have the conjunction between עת and משפט and, thus, read "time of judgment," which LXX also reflects. Such an understanding can give an impression that the wise know God's time for every matter, but Qohelet does not mean that humans can actually predict the future. Thus, the phrase is translated as "timely judgment" to suggest that the wise expect God's judgment when the time is ripe.

7 In Ecclesiastes, the relative pronoun אשר/ש often introduces a noun clause, which plays the role of subject or object in a sentence. For example, Eccl 1:9 has "מה־שהיה הוא שִׁיחִיה," that is, "whatever happened is what will happen." The text never uses כאשר instead of אשר/ש as in this verse. We have almost an identical sentence in Eccl 10:14, but it also has אשר as usual: ואשר יהיה מאחריו מי יגיד לו (then who can tell him what will happen afterward?). It seems that Eccl 8:7 intends to express what we have in Eccl 10:14, but it is difficult to know whether כאשר actually can function as אשר or is simply a scribal error. Cf. Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 1:144.

8 The phrase "your sacred oath" is from the expression שבועת אלהים, literally "an oath of God." Its meaning is not clear. Crenshaw understands it as "a sacred oath." Krüger similarly takes it as "an oath before God" implying that people have to obey king's command because they take oath to obey king before God. Seow also takes the expression as "sacred oath," but understands slightly differently. For Seow, the preceding expression על דברת is understood as "according to the manner of," and, therefore, the text advises us that one obeys king's command in recognition of the king's authority, but not because he or she took oath to obey. See Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 150; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 150; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 279.

(6b) Surely, the misfortunes of mortals lie heavy upon them.

(7) For they do not know what will happen; for who can tell them what will happen?

(8) No one has power over the life-breath to restrain the life-breath, or power over the day of death; there is no discharge from the battle, nor does wickedness deliver who practice it. (NRSV with my modifications)

Due to the ambiguity of many words and phrases here, the translation of this unit can vary. For example, if the verb *ישנה* in v. 1b is the *pu'al* form of *שנה* or *שנא* (to change) as in MT, the phrase *עז פניו* (the anger of his face) should be the subject of the verb. Then, the sentence is understood as “the hardness (literally strength or anger) of one’s countenance is changed.” Considering the context of the unit Eccl 8:1b–8, the one whose face is hardened but will be changed (or softened) is an absurd king who does whatever he or she wants to do. Then, v. 1b means that wise subordinates of an absurd king will shine their faces on or give tolerance to the king so that the king’s hardened countenance is softened. One may take *ישנה* as a form of active voice (*pi'el*) as in Vulgate, however. If that is the case, the phrase *עז פניו* has to be the object of the verb, and the sentence is understood as “one changes one’s angry countenance,” meaning wise subordinates of an absurd king will change their own countenances to avoid any unnecessary trouble that the king may bring. Despite the differences, however, both readings do not significantly differ from one another. It is still clear that Qohelet in this unit offers advice on issues that an absurd king (or the powerful) may cause to the king’s subordinates. Qohelet counsels the reader to be calm and obey this absurd king to avoid any unnecessary trouble. This type of advice is categorized as the royal proverbs for the retainers of the king in the wisdom tradition, especially in Proverbs in which the sages exhort the reader to act wisely in the royal court. Qohelet in this royal proverbs resonates mainly with the Father’s voice.⁹

The passage in Eccl 8:5b–6a provides a particularly clear element that shows Qohelet is under the dialogic influence of the Father’s voice. The sage Qohelet explains that it is wise to endure an absurd king because God will eventually bring justice to all when the time is ripe.¹⁰ Wisdom’s power to produce beneficial consequences is, of course, one of the core elements in the wisdom tradition attested throughout the whole text of Proverbs. And perhaps, the passage

9 For examples, see Prov 20:2 and 24:21.

10 As Fox points out, “this does not mean that he [a wise one] will know *when* things will happen, a possibility that Qohelet never concedes and that he explicitly denies in 3:11b and 8:7.” Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 278–79.

in Prov 8:22–31 most impressively explain why wisdom yields positive consequences in the world. The passage in Prov 8:22–31 describes wisdom as God's daughter who was with God when God created the world to show wisdom's close relationship with creation and the divine order.¹¹ The text implies that wisdom will certainly produce proper consequences by claiming that this wisdom resides among humans. The Father's voice ultimately aims at motivating the reader to commit him- or herself to wisdom's way or a life of virtue rather than providing the sages' observations about how God's retribution works in the world. The rhetoric of the wisdom-prosperity axiom in the teachings of the Father's voice, nonetheless, is still significant part of the Father's voice that Qohelet embraced. As such words of wisdom construct Qohelet's sage identity, Qohelet's utterances also affirm that the divine order and God's justice maintain the world, and he accordingly believes that wisdom will or at least ought to bring certain positive consequences even though wise actions may not immediately produce outcomes.

Qohelet's words that confirm wisdom's power and defend God's justice in this unit (Eccl 8:1b–6a out of 8:1b–8) do not exclusively reflect the Father's voice, however. Another significant voice we must recognize here is the Apocalyptic voice. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Father's voice's public political stance is to generally view the social conditions much more positively than the apocalyptic writers. In terms of Qohelet's view on the social conditions, Qohelet resonates more closely with the Apocalyptic voice in the passage since he symbolically expresses the injustice of earthly power by subtly inserting a caricature of an absurd king. Though Qohelet does not articulate the king's absurd behaviors in details, he clearly states in Eccl 8:3 that the king does everything that he or she wants to do and sometimes what the king desires terrifies the servants. Qohelet understands that the absurdity of the king's behaviors may provoke the servants to question about why the king should act in such absurd ways, but they actually cannot dare to ask the king what he or she is doing out of fear of the king. This scenery of royal court resembles the corruption of earthly power in an eschatological era in apocalyptic literature rather than the world of wisdom mythos that the Father's voice promotes. Since Qohelet offers his advice to calmly obey this absurd king to avoid any unnecessary trouble and asserts God's timely judgment (עַתָּה וּמִשְׁפָּט), which will

11 According to Sandoval, "the precise nature of Wisdom's relationship to the deity, creation, and humanity in this passage" is not straightforward and "the topic of much scholarly discussion." Sandoval, *Discourse of Wealth and Poverty*, 64.

eventually arrive at an appointed time, his words are certainly reminiscent of God's just retribution in the apocalyptic tradition.¹²

In fact, the terms *עַתָּה* and *מִשְׁפָּט* used in these verses are more closely identified with the Apocalyptic voice than the Father's voice, since a prominent patriarchal didactic text like Proverbs does not use these words to warn God's retribution. Also, Qohelet in Eccl 3 uses the concept of God's mysterious time (*עַתָּה*) to claim God's final establishment of justice. Here, Qohelet claims in a poetic fashion that there is a time for every matter, but humans cannot find the way God works. Through the fourteen pairs of life events composed of generally positive and negative experiences of human life, such as killing and healing, war and peace, and the like, Qohelet expresses God's absolute sovereignty. Qohelet admits that there can be certain occasions—those negative events in the fourteen pairs—that are objectionable from the perspective of humans, but Qohelet, just like the apocalyptic writers, asserts that God has made everything beautiful in its time, and in Eccl 3:17, he claims that God will judge everything in a proper time whether humans understand it or not. Like the apocalyptic writers who conceptualize history as if it is under the perfect control of God's plan and who urge humans to endure the hardships of the current situation of the world—which is apparently objectionable because of the lack of God's active intervention—Qohelet also defends God's justice by asserting that everything is still under the control of God, and justice will soon be realized by the hand of God, since there is an appointed time for every matter. Moreover, in Eccl 8:8, Qohelet, like apocalyptic writers, assures that no one has power over their life-breath and the day of death; the wicked cannot deliver themselves when God's time arrives. Even though Qohelet's advice in Eccl 8:1b–6a and 8:8 as royal proverbs primarily resonates with the Father's voice, we can also hear the Apocalyptic voice, which claims God's ultimate and timely judgment that no earthly power can escape.

Contrary to Qohelet's positive claim about wisdom's power and God's justice, especially God's timely judgment expressed in Eccl 8:5b–6a, Qohelet in 8:6b–7 suddenly denies the benefits of wisdom and God's justice that he just affirmed. (But as mentioned, Qohelet again reverts to the initial idea that upholds God's justice in v. 8.) For instance, in v. 6b, Qohelet says, "the misfortunes of mortals lie heavy upon them," and he even asks in v. 7, "who can tell them what will happen?" Qohelet realizes that wisdom cannot prevent misfortunes that unexpectedly visit and sometimes seriously damage our lives. Though Qohelet just expressed his belief about the divine order that eventually establishes God's justice in a timely manner, Qohelet, under the dialogic influence

12 Also see the prophetic tradition: Jer 8:7; 23:5; 33:15; Ezek 5:8; 39:21.

of the voice of Rational Intellect, also admits that it is uncertain or unverifiable whether or not God's justice will really come. Qohelet, therefore, disputes his own view that wisdom has the power to produce beneficial consequences and claims that no one knows what will happen in the future.

This idea is also eloquently expressed in Eccl 9:11–12. The rational Qohelet here reveals his observations on life and negates any strong connection between wise actions and beneficial consequences, especially material wealth, which is one of the most common rhetorical pieces of the Father's voice. The passage reads:

(11) שִׁבְתִּי וְרָאָה תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי לֹא לַקְלִים הַמְרוּץ וְלֹא לַגְּבוּרִים הַמִּלְחָמָה וְגַם לֹא לַחֲכָמִים לַחֵם וְגַם לֹא לַנְּבִנִים עֶשֶׂר וְגַם לֹא לַיָּדְעִים חֵן בִּיַּעַת וּפִגְעָה¹³ יִקְרָה אֶת־כָּל־ם
(12) כִּי גַם לֹא־יֵדַע הָאָדָם אֶת־עֵתוֹ כַּדְּגִים שֶׁנֶּאֱחָזִים בַּמִּצּוּדָה רָעָה וּכְצַפְרֵי הָאֲחֻזּוֹת
בַּפֶּחַ כֵּהֵם יוֹקְשִׁים בְּנֵי הָאָדָם לְעֵת רָעָה כְּשֶׁתִּפּוֹל עֲלֵיהֶם פִּתְאֹם (Eccl 9:11–12)

(11) Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the learned ones; but timely misfortune happens to them all.
(12) Surely, no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in an unfortunate net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a timely misfortune, when it suddenly falls upon them. (NRSV with my modifications)

In this passage, the rational Qohelet once again denies wisdom's benefits by using key metaphors initially from the realm of athletic and military competition; "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." The rational Qohelet understands that winning a race/battle often requires more than just swiftness/strength because various unpredictable elements can always lead human life to unexpected paths. For the rational Qohelet, human wisdom is vulnerable to folly and misfortune, as fish and birds are to suddenly approaching nets and snares of fishers and hunters. The rational Qohelet, thus, concludes that sometimes there is nothing that human wisdom can do in the face of timely misfortune (עֵת וּפִגְעָה).

13 Literally, "time and chance." Taking it as a hendiadys, Fox translates the phrase as "a time of mishap." See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 296. Seow similarly translates the phrase as "a timely incident." See Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 308. In light of the metaphors in Eccl 9:12, such as *מִצּוּדָה רָעָה* (an unfortunate net) and *פֶּחַ* (a snare), that describe sudden and unexpected misfortunes of life, the expression, *עֵת וּפִגְעָה*, should also refer to a misfortune that unpredictably occurs. Therefore, "time and chance" (עֵת וּפִגְעָה) can be rendered "timely misfortune," and understood as an expression for unpredictable misfortune.

What is particularly notable in the rational Qohelet's words here is that the phrase "timely misfortune" (עַתָּה וּפְגַעַ) in Eccl 9:11 is an expression that reminds of the phrase "timely judgment" (עַתָּה וּמִשְׁפָּט) in Eccl 8:5b and 6a. The sage Qohelet uses the phrase "timely judgment" to express his belief about retribution, claiming that wise actions can actually save the wise from misfortune. But, the rational Qohelet utilizes a similar phrase, "timely misfortune," which directly counteracts the concept of "timely judgment," in order to express that wise actions, in fact, cannot save the wise from misfortune. The rational Qohelet sometimes observes that misfortunes in human life are too significant to ignore, and he can no longer simply conform to the Father's voice that urges him to believe about the divine order that yields proper consequences of wise or foolish actions and establishes God's justice in the world.

Questioning God's justice is a seriously provocative social action that requires a strong ideological motivation. As a sage, whose subjectivity is constructed by the Father's voice that teaches God's justice, and as a retainer, whose power and privileges are rooted in the existing social structure, Qohelet has every reason to uphold the idea that God maintains the world in justice. Regardless of one's level of intellectuality or rationality, one can defend God's justice in the middle of recognizably absurd realities because defending God is a deeply ideological act. Such an act is, of course, always in accord with the ideology's own internal logic. Moreover, if we consider that defending God's justice is a basic Jewish religious norm in Qohelet's time, publicly disputing against it by committing one's self to writing about God's injustice is not feasible without another strong ideological motivation. Of course, the voice of Rational Intellect is one of the ideological motivations that enabled Qohelet to problematize God's justice. This voice alone, however, is not the only factor or a strong enough factor that drives Qohelet to confront the religious norm, God's justice. In fact, there has already existed a discourse of protest against religious norms. This discourse of protest is another dialogic voice that should have encouraged Qohelet to confront religiously authoritative belief.

The voice that complains about God's justice can be most closely related to the voice of the Victims introduced in the previous chapter, since this voice attributes the sufferings of the oppressed to the powerful, ultimately to God, rather than their sins. As mentioned, Lam 1:17 even depicts God as Israel's enemy because God is ultimately responsible for their tragic history. Several more examples can be offered here to demonstrate that a certain discourse of protest, which defends the perspectives of the victimized, had existed in ancient Israel that, up to a certain level, had challenged the mainstream religious ideology that defended God. For example, in Jonah, though the text clearly reveals the dominant ideology that defends God's justice through the

voice of God, the text does not merely suppress Jonah's voice that complains about God's unfair mercy on the Ninevites. Kenneth M. Craig, Jr. supports this understanding by arguing that the text is not a didactic text that delivers the message of "a single dominating point of view" but a "nondidactic literature" composed of "several independent and legitimate points of view."¹⁴ If God's voice in the text represents the mainstream religious ideology that defends God's justice, the character Jonah shows us a minority voice that complains about God's absurd decision to forgive Ninevites. As Crenshaw points out, the writer of Jonah is in a struggle to "to depict a deity who is at once perfectly just and perfectly merciful," but the writer's struggle is "without success, for even the deity cannot reconcile the irreconcilable."¹⁵ The book of Jonah is, therefore, a polyphonic text, and Jonah's voice represents the sentiment of some of the original readers who could not find justice in God's mercy on Israel's biggest enemies.¹⁶ The fact that God's voice in the book of Jonah never fully invalidates Jonah's complaints about the injustice caused by God's mercy on Ninevites suggests that there existed a discourse of protest or the voice of the Victims that questions God's way of managing the world.

There are a couple more passages that also allude to a certain discourse of protest that existed in ancient Israel. The discourse was also loud enough to get biblical writers' attentions. This voice of protest, the traces of which are left in Malachi, is, in fact, remarkably bold. In Mal 3:14–15, the prophet reveals people's complaints about God's justice as follows:

(14) אמרתם שוא עבד אלהים ומה־יבצע כי שמרנו משמרתו וכי הלכנו קדרנית מפני יהוה צבאות
(15) ועתה אנחנו מאשרים זדים גם־נבנו עשי רשעה גם בחנו אלהים וימלטו:
(Mal 3:14–15)

(14) You have said, "It is vain to serve God. What do we profit by keeping his command or by going about as mourners before the Lord of hosts?"

(15) Now we count the arrogant happy; evildoers not only prosper, but when they put God to the test they escape." (NRSV)

14 Craig, *A Poetics of Jonah: Art in the Service of Ideology* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 159–65, see especially 160.

15 James L. Crenshaw, *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 91.

16 Some other prophets, such as Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Zechariah, also prophesy either God's judgment on Assyria or Israel's ultimate victory over Assyria, and such prophecies evidence Israel's hostility against Assyria.

The passage describes there are people who do not believe about God's justice. These people, according to Mal 3:14–15, recognize that God's justice is not established in their world and, therefore, conclude that “it is vain to serve God.” Furthermore, the prophet reveals in Mal 2:17 that people say “כל־עשה רע טוב” (all who do evil are good), and they ask “איה אלהי המשפט” (where is the God of justice?). Compared to what Malachi hears from these people, Qohelet's complaints about the prosperity of the wicked/folly and the hardship of the righteous even sound moderate and mild.

We also hear a confession of a poet in Ps 73 about unobservable God's retributive judgment on injustice manifest in the world. The poem consists of twenty-eight verses, and the first half (vv. 1–16) talks about the poet's observations that claim that the world is not under the control of God at all. The poet tells us that nothing bad really happens to the wicked so that the wicked become more and more wicked without fearing God (vv. 1–9). But it is not the poet alone who observes the absurdity of the world, but many others as well (vv. 10–11). For example, in v. 11, the poet says:

ואמרו איכה ידע־אל ויש דעה בעליון

And they say, “How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?”
(NRSV)

The poet reveals that because of people's repeated experiences of unpunished injustice, they insult God by sarcastically questioning God's knowledge of the wicked. In the latter half of the poem (vv. 17–28), the poet confesses his or her piety that is not extinguished despite the absurdity of the world. Nevertheless, the world is still absurd for the poet. The poet's pious confession comes from his or her satisfaction with the poet's personal “nearness to God” (קרבת אלהים) (לִי־טוב) rather than with God's righteous control of the world.

The three texts mentioned above show us that, even though the mainstream religious ideology in YHWHism is to proclaim God's justice, such an ideology could not perfectly dictate the people of Israel. As discussed in the previous chapter, hegemony is always constructed through dialogues of various kinds, such as conflicts, negotiations, compromises, and agreement, to name a few. As we just saw, the dominant Jewish religious ideology should have dealt with various forms of protest from various segments of the society. Therefore, it is also reasonable to believe that Qohelet's words that criticize God's justice (or God's mercy) originate from what I call “the discourse of protest” rather than from an innovative cultural atmosphere of Hellenistic Judea even though the

empirical spirit of the time should have fostered empirical perspectives in Judaism. While the voice of Rational Intellect laid an epistemological foundation of his disputation against God's justice, there also existed a certain discourse of protest in Qohelet's time that dares Qohelet to reject the ideological claim of God's justice.

Despite his bold rejection of God's justice, we already know that his rationality does not completely represent Qohelet's identity. Qohelet utters the contradictions about wisdom's consequences and God's justice because multiple voices construct his subjectivity and impact his consciousness simultaneously when he speaks. Qohelet is apparently a sage who believes about or at least expects to see the power of wisdom and God's ultimate justice, but he never fully subordinates his rational voice to what he learned from the Father's voice. Qohelet, thus, aggressively and, perhaps painfully, allows the rational voice to challenge his own belief and expectations about wisdom's power and God's justice. Moreover, though Qohelet belongs to the scribal retainers, who must serve the interests of the ruling class to maintain their limited privileges, he critically describes earthly power and the social conditions because the Apocalyptic voice also significantly shapes his recognition of the harsh political and economic realities for the oppressed. It is also true that Qohelet, like apocalyptic writers, declares God's ultimate justice despite the corruption and injustice pervasive in his world.

Qohelet's words, as well as his identity, are, therefore, unfinalizable, since he does seem to vacillate between different perspectives. Qohelet does not suffer from multiple personality disorder, however. We should not assume that Qohelet is completely possessed by, for example, the spirit of the voice of Rational Intellect when he speaks about the arbitrariness of world events and unpredictableness of human life experiences (Eccl 8:6b–7). Even in those utterances, Qohelet is still a sage. As Bakhtin would insist, Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue is double-voiced (or multiple-voiced). As we have seen in Bakhtin's understanding of Raskolnikov's case, Raskolnikov layers his own voice over the words of others' voices that he re-creates, with certain emotions, such as irony and indignation. Likewise, when the rational Qohelet boldly challenges the divine order by asking "Who knows what will happen?," the sage Qohelet also layers over these rational words with a sage's ironic intonation and accent. Without the presence of the sage Qohelet, the rational Qohelet would not express disappointment or pain of observing the arbitrariness of the world. In other words, when the rational Qohelet reveals the arbitrariness of what is happening in the world, he is not an atheist or an anti-teleologist like some Greek philosophers of his time. Then, when Qohelet

speaks like a rational thinker, we must also hear the sage Qohelet's voice that speaks simultaneously with uncomfortable feelings, such as irony, agony, or anxiety, about the rational Qohelet's observations, or even fear about God's judgment on his disbelief. In the same manner, when the sage Qohelet speaks about God's timely judgment in Eccl 8:5b–6a and 8, Qohelet is still a rational thinker who may implicitly cast doubt on it. The sage Qohelet cannot be fully confident about the Father's voice's teachings and perhaps feels irony or even the sense of shame as he denies his own empirical observations. Because these contradictory voices construct Qohelet's consciousness, his words are double-voiced and internally dialogized.

2 Is Wisdom Superior to Folly in an Absurd World?

Qohelet's utterances in the passages discussed above reveal both his affirmation and his denial of some practical level consequences that wise actions can bring. As mentioned, Qohelet also deals with the issues of wisdom's benefits at a more fundamental or ultimate level. For example, in Eccl 2:13–14a, the sage Qohelet proclaims the ultimate superiority of wisdom over folly by comparing these concepts with light and darkness respectively rather than by providing specific social or economic benefits that wise actions can bring. However, what follows in 2:14b–17 is the rational Qohelet's pessimistic speculations on the undeniable fate of all; that is, everyone dies. The rational Qohelet reminds that a wise life can be vain or absurd because death discriminates no one. The passages read as follows:

- (13) וראיתי אני שיש יתרון לחכמה מן־הסכלות כיתרון האור מן־החשך
 (14a) החכם עיניו בראשו והסכיל בחשך הולך
 (14b) וידעתי גם־אני שמקרה אחד יקרה את־כלם
 (15) ואמרתי אני בלבי כמקרה הסכיל גם־אני יקרני ולמה חכמתי אני אז יותר ודברתי
 בלבי שגם־זה הבל
 (16) כי אין זכרון לחכם עם־הסכיל לעולם בשכבר הימים הבאים הכל נשכח ואיך ימות
 החכם עם־הסכיל
 (17) ושנאתי את־החיים כי רע עלי המעשה שנעשה תחת השמש כ־הכל הבל ורעות
 רוח (Eccl 2:13–17)

- (13) Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.
 (14a) The wise have eyes in their head, but fools walk in darkness.
 (14b) Yet I perceived that the same fate befalls all of them.

(15) Then I said to myself, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also; why then have I been so very wise?" And I said to myself that this also is absurd.

(16) For there is no enduring remembrance of the wise or of fools, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How can the wise die just like fools?

(17) So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is absurd and a chasing after wind. (NRSV with my modifications)

Notice the contrasting imagery of wisdom and folly in vv. 13–14a. In these verses, the sage Qohelet compares wisdom with light, and folly with darkness to maximize their differences. It is a typical rhetoric to contrast wisdom with folly in the wisdom tradition. According to Crenshaw, conventionally "the sages had associated light with the wise (Prov 6:23, 27; Ps 119:105)."¹⁷ For example, "teaching" (תורה)¹⁸ is "light" (אור) in Prov 6:23. Moreover, as Seow notes, "when light is compared with darkness, light is life and darkness is death" (Isa 9:1; Ezek 32:8; Amos 5:18–20; Job 17:12–13; 18:18; Lam 3:2), and thus "the contrast between wisdom and folly is supposed to be that stark."¹⁹ What the sage Qohelet expresses here is wisdom's ultimate power as it fundamentally leads the wise to "light," the right path of life, the side of God.

Contrary to the sage Qohelet's positive utterances about the excellence of wisdom in human life attested in Eccl 2:13–14a, the rational Qohelet, in the rest of the passage (vv. 14b–17), reveals his frustration about the powerlessness of wisdom before the fate that happens to all regardless of one's wisdom and righteousness. Under the dialogic influence of the voice of Rational Intellect, Qohelet once again contradicts one of the core teachings of the Father's voice by admitting that, sometimes, a wise life can be vain or absurd. In the wisdom tradition and, in fact, in other biblical traditions as well (cf. Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16; 6:2; Prov 3:16; 11:4; 11:28), the wise and the righteous prolong their lives, while fools and the wicked may experience premature death.²⁰ According to

17 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 84.

18 The term תורה (teaching) in Prov 6:23 refers back to the expression, תורת אִמִּךָ (your mother's teaching), in Prov 6:20.

19 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 153.

20 As Fox notes, "when Proverbs says ... 'righteousness saves one from death' (11:4b), it does not mean that the righteous are immortal, but that they will be spared the sudden and untimely death that befalls the wicked in a 'day of wrath' (11:4a)." Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 56.

the passage in Eccl 2:14b, however, Qohelet observes that the same fate comes to everyone.

In order to more fully understand what Qohelet means by “the same fate” in Eccl 2:14, a few parallel passages in which Qohelet more thoroughly deals with the issues of the same fate should be discussed. For example, the passage, Eccl 7:15, reads as follows:

את־הכל ראיתי בימי הבלי יש צדיק אבד בצדקו ויש רשע מאריך ברעתו (Eccl 7:15)

In my absurd life, I have seen everything. There are righteous people who perish in their righteousness, and there are wicked people who prolong their life in their evil-doing. (NRSV with my modifications)

In this passage, the rational Qohelet contrasts the life of the wicked with that of the righteous in a way that he, as a sage, would do otherwise. Qohelet's observations tell himself that not all wicked ones perish as they are supposed to do and not all righteous people live long. For the rational Qohelet, long life and premature death can occur to anyone regardless of one's wisdom and righteousness instead of according to the divine order. This idea sarcastically speaks to the Father's voice in Qohelet's consciousness pointing out God is responsible for such happenings since, for the Father's voice, no one but God alone controls death.

Moreover, according to the passage in Eccl 8:10–12a, Qohelet saw that the wicked live long and have a proper burial while the righteous are not buried but forgotten in his or her city after death.²¹ The passage reads:

(10) ובכן ראיתי רשעים קברים ובאו וממקום קדוש יהלכו וישתכחו בעיר אשר כן־עשו²²
גם־זה הבל

(11) אשר אין־נעשה פתגם מעשה הרעה מהרה על־כן מלא לב בני־האדם בהם לעשות
רע

(12a) אשר חטא עשה רע מאת ומאריך לו (Eccl 8:10–12a)

21 Though text itself does not specify when the righteous are forgotten, “immediately after death” of the righteous is apparently implied, since the fate of the righteous and the wicked are contrasted in this verse. See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 284.

22 As Seow reads, the word כן in the expression כן־עשו is taken as an adverb meaning “rightly.” See Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 285.

(10) Then I saw the wicked buried; they used to go in and out of the holy place; but the one has acted rightly were forgotten in a city. This also is vanity.

(11) Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the human heart is fully set to do evil,

(12a) because sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives.
(NRSV with my modifications)

This passage also informs us about the fact that long life and premature death can occur to anyone regardless of one's wisdom and righteousness. Qohelet here discusses the same idea that he expressed in Eccl 7:15 in a more detailed way. According to the passage, the wicked prosper, but the righteous are not even properly buried. As Seow points out, "denial of a proper burial is a curse that the worst sinners were supposed to suffer."²³ For the rational Qohelet, the divine order is clearly not working appropriately.

In light of Qohelet's historical context, we can imagine that what Qohelet observes is probably the contrasting life experiences of the powerful and the powerless. As discussed, Qohelet, through the moral consciousness of the apocalyptic tradition, notices that the powerful, including foreign rulers and their local collaborators, are the oppressors and the primary sources of social injustice. Therefore, for Qohelet, the powerful are often the wicked. Of course, the powerless are not necessarily righteous. However, since Qohelet often identifies the poor with the wise as in Eccl 4:13, 6:8, and 9:15–16 and consistently criticizes the powerful as a profound source of oppression, we can assume that, in Qohelet's mind, certain righteous ones are among the poor and the oppressed. Then, what we can imagine here is that, because of their power and wealth, proper burials are offered to the deceased of powerful families after their prosperous life, but the deceased of the righteous who are poor and oppressed may also suffer from the lack of appropriate mortuary rituals. The justice system is not working properly, and for the rational Qohelet, God also does not properly intervene to correct the corrupted system.

What Qohelet means by "the same fate" in Eccl 2:14 is, therefore, not merely death but comprehensive life experiences including death. Qohelet notices that fortunes rather befall the powerful or the wicked, and misfortunes come to the powerless or the righteous in the corrupted social system of his world. Moreover, Qohelet observes that even death—whether premature death or something that comes after a prolonged life—visits both the wise and fools arbitrarily and indiscriminately.

23 Ibid., 294.

Moreover, as the passage in Eccl 2:15 reveals, Qohelet acknowledges that what happens to fools also happens to himself. Despite Qohelet's wisdom, he seems to have experienced certain life events that should have happened only to fools. Qohelet in Eccl 8:14, thus, concludes that his absurd experience is a general phenomenon. The passage reads:

(14) יִשְׁהַבֵּל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ צַדִּיקִים אֲשֶׁר מִגִּיעַ אֱלֹהִים כַּמַּעֲשֶׂה
הַרְשָׁעִים וְיֵשׁ רָשָׁעִים שֶׁמִּגִּיעַ אֱלֹהִים כַּמַּעֲשֶׂה הַצַּדִּיקִים אִמְרָתִי שֶׁגַּם־זֶה הַבֵּל

(14) There is an absurdity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people who are treated according to the conduct of the wicked, and there are wicked people who are treated according to the conduct of the righteous. I said that this also is absurd. (NRSV with my modifications)

Qohelet realizes that the righteous, including himself, experience what the wicked deserve, and the wicked experience what the righteous deserve. It seems that Qohelet observes that the social structure only reinforces such absurdity, and there is no God's proper intervention either. As Crenshaw points out, for the rational Qohelet, the righteous-wise and wicked-fool connections are undeniably broken and even "reversed."²⁴ Qohelet, thus, laments, "I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is absurd and a chasing after wind" (Eccl 2:17). As we saw in Eccl 2:13–14a, Qohelet is a sage who acknowledges wisdom's ultimate power in human life, but at the same time, his observations on the same fate that totally disrupts the divine order and God's justice make him wonder why anyone should pursue wisdom. His realization of the same fate even makes him despair of life as all these life events contradict the divine order or God's justice.

If Qohelet is purely a rational thinker or a Hellenistic philosopher, death might simply be one of the most apparently observable facts about life, which everyone expects to experience someday. If the voice of Rational Intellect solely constructed Qohelet's subjectivity, death might not have been such a big problem, since he should not have any desire to see "proper" consequences of wisdom or the workings of the divine order. As discussed, for example, for Epicureans, death for all forms of life is just a part of the endless cycle of renewal of the world. But in Eccl 2:17, Qohelet shows how painfully he recognizes the problems of death by using an extreme rhetoric "I hated life." The rational Qohelet's reaction to death seems to be quite overheated. Nevertheless, his

24 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 140.

reaction is understandable if we recognize the layer of the Father's voice in his rational remarks on the same fate.

As we saw, Qohelet contradicts himself regarding the superiority of wisdom over folly. His monologue is, again, dialogized by multiple voices. From a Bakhtinian perspective, even when Qohelet observes the world as an empiricist, he is still a Jewish sage whose identity is primarily constructed by the Father's voice to which the notion that God is absurd or unjust is simply unacceptable. Qohelet, as a sage, has a strong desire to verify the workings of the divine order, such as long life of the righteous or the wise. But this desire is frustrated by his empirical observations on the absurd reality, especially premature death of the wise or a totally improper end of the righteous like denial of a proper burial. For the sage Qohelet, there seems no other problem more serious than the problems of the same fate vis-à-vis God's justice because both unpunished wickedness and unrewarded righteousness cannot be corrected beyond the point of death. As discussed in the previous chapter, Qohelet in many passages emphasizes that his observations and experiences are done only "under the sun." Longman points out that Qohelet's repetitive use of the phrase "under the sun" shows that his worldview does not take the transcendent scope into account for his intellectual exploration.²⁵ Indeed, in Eccl 9:10, Qohelet advises his readers to do their best whatever they do in order not to waste their lifetime, since all go to Sheol where there is no *מעשה* (work), *חשבון* (intellectual accounting), *דעת* (knowledge), or *חכמה* (wisdom).²⁶ For Qohelet, Sheol is a place where nothing occurs, neither mental nor physical activities. Therefore, no punishment and no reward can be executed after death because death is the ultimate end of all forms of life in Qohelet's mind. After death, no one can expect any benefit of wise actions or the proper execution of God's justice. The sage Qohelet believes, therefore, that, if God maintains the world in justice, it has to be established within one's lifetime whoever that is. But his observations frustrate what Qohelet, as a sage, desires to see. Perhaps, the sage Qohelet may regard injustices practiced by humans as "normal," but injustices that are recognizably the work of God deeply agonizes and perplexes Qohelet. Thus, Qohelet lamentingly questions, "Why then have I been so very wise?" (Eccl 2:15). This question suggests that his sage consciousness constantly affects his rational thought and makes him cry over the absurdity of the world

25 Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 66. In the case of Krüger, he relates the expression "nothing new under the sun" in Eccl 1:9 with Qohelet's critical response to later prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology. See Krüger, "Dekonstruktion und Rekonstruktion," 110.

26 For the meanings of the word *חשבון*, see pp. 204–6 below.

in the middle of his rational thinking. Here again, a Bakhtinian reader should recognize the double-voicedness of Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue.

But it is not just the sage side of Qohelet that the rational voice in Qohelet's consciousness disturbs. As intimated, Qohelet's voice of Rational Intellect in Eccl 2:14b–17 also directly aims at the Apocalyptic voice. Through the notion of the same fate for all, the passage above displays the disputation of the voice of Rational Intellect against the Apocalyptic voice's belief about God's justice. In apocalyptic literature, although the multitude of the righteous may suffer from the total corruption of the world and even die, God's justice will surely arrive at an appointed time, even after the death of those righteous ones. Therefore, in apocalyptic literature, there can be no hindrance to the establishment of God's ultimate justice, even death of the righteous. But the rational Qohelet rejects this theology. Perdue, thus, argues that Qohelet is in agreement with "the apocalyptic sages" in terms of the social injustice that "prevails in the social reality" but is discordant with them concerning their claims on divine eschatological intervention and life after death.²⁷ As I sketched out in chapter four, pessimistic, skeptical, and even hedonistic discourses of the ancient Near East, which are well attested in Egyptian tomb inscriptions, perhaps also constructed Qohelet's pessimistic expressions about the absurdity of the world, especially the same fate that befalls every living beings. All these voices are internally dialogized and interpenetrate each other constructing Qohelet's un-finalizable consciousness, and the bitterness of this realization of the same fate of all is greatly increased in Qohelet.

While Qohelet's contradictions on wisdom's ultimate benefit and God's justice in Eccl 2:13–17 intensively displays Qohelet's internal dialogue between different voices, some more scattered utterances of Qohelet further evidence that multiple voices are conflicting one another in Qohelet's interior dialogue about wisdom's ultimate worth and God's justice. The passages are as follows:

לב חכם לימינו ולב כסיל לשמאלו (Eccl 10:2)

The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of a fool to the left. (NRSV)

כי מקרה²⁸ בני־האדם ומקרה הבהמה ומקרה אחד להם כמות זה כן מות זה ורוח אחד לכל ומותר האדם מן־הבהמה אין כי הכל הבל (Eccl 3:19)

²⁷ Perdue, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic," 256–57.

²⁸ The word מקרה is in absolute state, but taken as construct state. The sentence otherwise cannot make sense.

For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is absurd. (NRSV with my modifications)

(2) [הכל] כִּאֲשֶׁר לְכָל מִקְרָה אֶחָד לְצַדִּיק וְלִרְשָׁע לְטוֹב וְלִטְהוֹר וְלִטְמָא וְלִזְבָּח וְלֵאִשָּׁר
אֵינָנו זֶבַח כְּטוֹב כַּחַטָּא הַנִּשְׁבַּע כִּאֲשֶׁר שְׁבוּעָה יֵרָא
(3a) זֶה רָע בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר-נִעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בִּי-מִקְרָה אֶחָד לְכָל (Eccl 9:2–3a)

(2) [everything], since the same fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to those who sacrifice and those who do not sacrifice. As are the good, so are the sinners; those who swear are like those who shun an oath.

(3a) This is an evil in all that happens under the sun, that the same fate comes to everyone. (NRSV with my modifications)

In Eccl 10:2, the sage Qohelet once again proclaims wisdom's ultimate worth by describing that wisdom leads to the "right" (יָמִין) and folly to the "left" (שְׂמָאל). Like the contrasted imagery employed in Eccl 2:13–14a (light and darkness), Qohelet uses imagery of "right" and "left" to claim the distance between wisdom and folly. While such imagery does not seem customary in the wisdom tradition, especially in Proverbs, it clearly shows the contrasted characteristics of wisdom and folly that are commonplace in the wisdom tradition.³⁰ Perhaps, as Seow puts it, "right" and "left" have ethical implications: "right" is good and "left" is bad.³¹ If so, the ethical implications in Qohelet's use of the imagery of "right and left" remind us of the fundamental connection between wisdom and justice or right living in the wisdom tradition that God must favor.

However, the other two utterances of Qohelet in Eccl 3:19 and 9:2–3a, again, contradict his proclamation of wisdom's worth and God's justice. The rational Qohelet recognizes that death not only deprives a person of everything that he or she has, but it also nullifies all the differences between wisdom and folly, between righteousness and wickedness. The rational Qohelet claims that

29 This first word in v. 2 seems to be a part of the last phrase of v. 1, "everything before them" (הַכֹּל לִפְנֵיהֶם). However, this הַכֹּל in v. 2 does not make clear sense with that preceding phrase in v. 1, nor in v. 2. Thus, following LXX, Syr, and Vul, scholars often read it as הָבַל instead of הַכֹּל and take it as a part of v. 1. For example, Fox translates, "Everything one sees is absurd" (הָבַל לִפְנֵיהֶם הָבַל). See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 291–92.

30 For some examples, see Prov 6:23; 14:8, 24; 16:22.

31 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 312–13. Crenshaw notes that "in ancient Israel the right hand connoted power and deliverance.... The left hand usually symbolized ineptness and perversity." Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 169–70. See also Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 179.

one fate happens to all, regardless of one's wisdom, ritual cleanness, and piety (Eccl 9:2–3a). He also claims that even the fate of humans and that of animals are the same. As Mark R. Sneed points out, Qohelet “subversively deconstructs favorite dichotomies of traditional wisdom and Judaism.”³² Qohelet's rational utterances about the same fate are, thus, seriously and widely attacking biblical intellectual traditions. Therefore, these words of Qohelet surely contradict the Father's voice. But these words contend especially against the Apocalyptic voice. As discussed, Qohelet's understanding of the fate challenges one of the key theological concepts that apocalyptic writers promote; that is, punishment and reward after one's death or eschatological intervention. Qohelet's words in Eccl 9:2–3a entirely reject such a notion of God's justice. Nevertheless, as discussed, Qohelet does not speak purely as an empiricist who would accept absurd happenings in the world without theological discomfort insofar as the Father's voice remains in his consciousness. Behind all his acknowledgment of the same fate, the Bakhtinian reader should be able to recognize the sage Qohelet's big question, “why and how is it possible that the same fate happens to all if God's divine order is properly working?” Or, perhaps, the sage Qohelet keeps thinking of other ways to explain the problem of the same fate, even though he sometimes acknowledges it. Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue is, thus, double-voiced. In sum, the passages in Eccl 10:2, 3:19, and 9:2–3a once again show multiple voices' dialogue in Qohelet's consciousness. As these conflicting voices author Qohelet's mind simultaneously, he is deeply agonized.

3 Is Wisdom Better than Pleasure?

The third topic in Qohelet's discourse of wisdom's benefits, in which we can hear Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue, is about the matter of weighing social virtues of wisdom over individual happiness and pleasure. The Father's voice, like the voice of Rational Intellect, does not claim that wise actions will always and immediately result in positive consequences according to the divine order or God's justice. But what makes the Father's voice distinguished from the voice of Rational Intellect is that the Father's voice consistently urges its addressees to commit themselves to wisdom's way (Prov 15:16; 16:8; and 28:6). In the world that the Father's voice envisions, wisdom is better than wealth, power, and all other privileges; wisdom is itself the ultimate benefit. Of course,

32 Sneed, *The Politics of Pessimism in Ecclesiastes: A Social-Science Perspective* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 186.

it does not mean that individual happiness never matters in the wisdom tradition. The Father's rhetoric of retribution, which often guarantees prosperity and security for the wise, discloses that fulfilling individual happiness, not just social virtues, is an important motivation for being wise. Nevertheless, as indicated, the Father's voice differs from the voice of Rational Intellect in its high estimation of wisdom or its insistence on wisdom's way. This ideological position is prominently attested in Eccl 4:13. Despite the verse's clear representation of the ideological position, however, its following verses (Eccl 4:14–16) somewhat obscure the meaning of Eccl 4:13. Thus, I offer a reading of the unit, Eccl 4:13–16, to clearly elaborate that Qohelet in Eccl 4:13, indeed, sets the highest value on wisdom. The passage reads:

- (13) טוב ילד מסכן וחכם ממלך זקן וכסיל אשר לא־ידע להזהר עוד
 (14) כי־מבית הסורים יצא למלך כי גם במלכותו נולד רש
 (15) ראיתי את־כל־החיים המהלכים תחת השמש עם הילד השני אשר יעמד תחתיו
 (16) אין־קץ לכל־העם לכל אשר־היה לפניהם גם האחרונים לא ישמחו־בו כי־גס־הבל ורעיון רוח (Eccl 4:13–16)

(13) Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king, who will no longer take advice.

(14) for he came out of prison to reign; for also in his kingdom he was born poor.

(15) I saw all the living, who are moving about under the sun, are with the youth, the second one who will stand in place of the one.

(16) There is no end to all those people who were before them as well as the ones who will come later. They will not rejoice in it. Surely this also is vanity and a chasing after wind. (NRSV with my modifications)

Qohelet's utterance in Eccl 4:13 quite apparently reveals Qohelet's conformity to the wisdom ideology that wisdom itself is the ultimate benefit, worth more than anything else in human life. Yet, the ambiguous identities of the characters in Eccl 4:14 confuse the idea expressed in v. 13. For example, in v. 14, we encounter three pronouns—*he* who comes from prison to reign, *he* who was born poor, and *his* kingdom—but antecedents of these pronouns are not clearly specified.

A clue to the solution of the problem of v. 14 is the expression “no longer takes advice” (לא־ידע להזהר עוד) in v. 13. The king in v. 13 is described to be a foolish one (כסיל) in his old age, but the word “no longer” here suggests that the king was once a wise youth who took advice seriously. If so, then, no one knows how the poor wise youth in v. 13 may change as he ages. As v. 14 suggests,

the wise youth can even become a king with his wisdom in the future, but, after the youth rises to the throne and grows older, he can become a foolish old king who no longer gives ear to wise advice. Qohelet does not have to specify the identities of the poor wise youth and the foolish old king in v. 13 as he is talking about a general phenomenon rather than a specific historical event. For this reason, we can consider that Qohelet intentionally makes the meanings of the pronouns (he and his) in v. 14 ambivalent by not specifying their antecedents so that the pronoun “he” in v. 14 is applicable both to the poor wise youth and the foolish old king. We can perhaps re-read vv. 13–14 as follows: “it is better to be a wise youth than to be a foolish old king, for a wise one can come out of prison to reign though that wise one may turn into a foolish king; then also in his kingdom, another wise one is born poor.”³³ Ecclesiastes 4:13–14 is, therefore, not an anecdote about two specific characters. Rather, the passage claims that, in whatever circumstances, it is better to pursue wisdom.

This point becomes clearer if the larger unit is taken into account. Each verse in this unit presents two characters who represent a younger and an older generation respectively, and therefore, this unit describes the world in which a newer generation comes as an older generation passes away. The characters who appear in the scene are these: v. 13: the poor wise youth versus the old foolish king; v. 14: he who came out of prison to reign versus he who was born poor in his kingdom; v. 15: all the living, who are moving about under the sun versus their successors; v. 16: people of a former generation versus people of a latter generation. As discussed, v. 14 can present one or two characters due to the ambivalence of the pronouns. But even though we take the verse as presenting only one person, the verse still alludes to a circulation of generations by showing a change of one’s social status in one’s lifetime, from being born poor to becoming a new ruler replacing a king of an older generation. And, as the phrase “there is no end to all those people” (אִין־קֶץ לְכָל־הָעָם) in v. 16 indicates, there is no end to the circulation of generations as a younger generation becomes an older generation, and another younger generation succeeds them. Already in Eccl 1:4–8, Qohelet revealed the “weariness” (יָגַעַם) of this endless circulation. What needs to be recognized in this unit anew is that an older generation was once a younger generation, and a younger generation will eventually become an older generation; many absurd events can

33 The verbs, יָצָא and יָלַד, are in the “perfect” forms, which are often understood as completed actions. Thus, the translation above uses past tense. However, it is also possible to take the perfect as the so-called “proverbial perfect,” as in this case, which “denotes actions, events, or facts that are not time conditioned, and considered to be general truths.” See Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 56.

happen: a poor person can rise to a throne; a wise one can become a fool; and, of course, fools can also be rulers. As the sage Qohelet once again reflects on all these wearisome events in the world, he claims that no matter what happens in the world, wisdom is worth pursuing because wisdom's value is better than everything that humans can possibly possess, even wealth and social status. Qohelet in Eccl 4:13–16, therefore, declares his ideological position as a sage: wisdom as the ultimate benefit and his commitment to wisdom's way.

What should be further noticed in the sage Qohelet's utterance in Eccl 4:13 is that Qohelet reflects not just the idea of the Father's voice but also its rhetorical features. In Perry's terms, Qohelet in Eccl 4:13 employs one type of "better-than" proverbs, "the most important category of sayings" that were used even before Proverbs in the wisdom tradition.³⁴ Some of the examples such as Prov 15:16, 16:8; and 28:6 were already mentioned when I introduced the wisdom ideology of the Father's voice in the previous chapter.³⁵ What needs to be remembered about those example passages and many other "better-than" sayings in Proverbs is that the Father's voice employs those sayings to express the wisdom ideology—wisdom is the ultimate benefit and worth pursuing more than any other of wisdom's benefits, such as social status and wealth. Qohelet expresses not merely the content of wisdom ideology, but importantly also adopts a typical form of that discourse.

An important implication of Qohelet's use of a "better-than" saying to express the wisdom ideology is that Qohelet embraces the position of the "father" in typical patriarchal didactic wisdom sayings. As explained in the genre section of chapter two, Bakhtin's notion of genre is a "totality of artistic utterances" in which a way of thinking (ideology) and its expressions (form) are inseparably connected like a painter's representation is inseparable from his or her observations.³⁶ In this respect, "better-than" sayings can be recognized as a genre since this form is, as Perry states, "the most important category of sayings," connected with the wisdom ideology. As expressions are inseparable from a way of thinking (ideology) in a genre, different genres see and show different aspects of reality. Or, different genres control reality in different ways. In this respect, the genre of "better-than" sayings conceptualizes certain aspects of reality and shows them in a distinctive way. Through the genre of "better-than" sayings, the Father's voice conceptualizes a world where wisdom

34 Theodore Anthony Perry, *Wisdom Literature and the Structure of Proverbs* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 40. For the examples and varying structures of "better-than" proverbs, see Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 597–605.

35 See chap. 5, pp. 114–16.

36 See chap. 2, p. 40.

is worth pursuing because wisdom itself is the ultimate benefit and the most precious purpose of human life. In a polyphonic genre, such as Ecclesiastes, a particular genre or form (i.e., “better-than” sayings)—typical of a monologic text like Proverbs—becomes an ideological voice that is dialogized with other genres or voices. This voice is not subordinated to other voices but independent and equally valid as other voices. Therefore, Qohelet’s use of the “better-than” form or genre in Eccl 4:13 most prominently demonstrates how deeply Qohelet’s sage identity is constructed by his dialogic contact with the wisdom ideology of the Father’s voice and how fully Qohelet grasps its core teaching. In other words, Qohelet is a sage who is literate, well-versed in the patriarchal didactic wisdom tradition, an intellectual elite, and a good “son” of the “father” who upholds the idea that wisdom is the foundational benefit in human life.³⁷ Constructed by such an ideological voice, the sage Qohelet in Eccl 4:13 expresses the wisdom ideology as if he is the “father” in patriarchal didactic wisdom discourse.

However, the wisdom ideology that Qohelet embraces does not completely dominate Qohelet’s consciousness because his subjectivity was also constructed by his close dialogic contact with the voice of Rational Intellect. As we cannot finalize Qohelet’s identity, we also cannot know how fully Qohelet commits himself to the wisdom ideology. In a number of passages, Qohelet’s words are in contrast to the wisdom ideology of the Father’s voice. The following utterances of Qohelet are notable examples:

וראיתי כי אין טוב מאשר ישמח האדם במעשיו כִּי־הוא חלקו כי מי יביאנו לראות במה
שִׁיְהִי אַחֲרָיו (Eccl 3:22)

So I saw that there is nothing better than that all should take pleasure in their works, for that is their lot; who can bring them to see what will be after them? (NRSV with my modifications)

ושבַחתי אֲנִי אֶת־הַשִּׂמְחָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין־טוֹב לָאָדָם תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי אִם־לֵאכּוֹל וּלְשִׂתּוֹת
וּלְשִׂמוֹחַ וְהוּא יִלּוֹנוּ בַּעֲמָלּוֹ יְמֵי חַיָּיו אֲשֶׁר־נִתְּנָלוּ הָאֱלֹהִים תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ (Eccl 8:15)

37 Qohelet’s “better than” saying in this wisdom ideological statement is not without his peculiar accent. As Fox notes, wisdom is often identified with “age,” but Qohelet in Eccl 4:13 disconnects wisdom with old age. See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 224–25. But, this negative depiction of the king should be understood as Qohelet’s subtle criticism against the political leaders of his world.

Therefore I commend pleasure, for there is nothing good for people under the sun but to eat, to drink, and to enjoy themselves; and this will accompany them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun. (NRSV with my modifications)

As mentioned, individual happiness is also an important concern of traditional wisdom, but the Father's voice never prioritizes individual happiness over wisdom. However, Qohelet, as he is under the dialogic influence of the voice of Rational Intellect, proclaims that nothing is better than pleasure in Eccl 3:22, 8:15, and many other passages (i.e., 2:24; 3:12–13; 5:17; 9:7). The rational Qohelet prioritizes individual happiness over wisdom.

Qohelet's interest in happiness corresponds to the atmosphere of his world since human well-being or happiness is what Hellenistic philosophical schools concerned with, but the rational Qohelet's prioritization of pleasure over moral obligations echoes more strongly with Epicureanism than other philosophical schools. But it does not mean that Epicureanism exclusively affects Qohelet. As discussed in the previous chapter, the pessimistic, skeptical, and hedonistic ideas found in the discourse of ancient Near East are also a significant part of Qohelet's consciousness. Moreover, Hellenistic philosophical discourses are also dialogically formed as Greek colonizers encounter with indigenous people of the conquered territories and their cultures, which must include the Near East. Nevertheless, as mentioned, Qohelet's prioritization of pleasure over wisdom's virtues seems most strongly echoes with Epicureanism. For Epicureans, god or divine power does not maintain the world, and all events that occur in the world are without divine purpose. This is why scholars consider Epicureanism to be anti-teleological.³⁸ If god's absolute regulatory guidance is absent, then no moral behavior is mandatory. Therefore, the greatest good for Epicureans is pleasure. By the same token, Qohelet's denial of God's intervention in human affairs or interaction with humans resulted in making him envision an anti-teleological world where no moral responsibility is strictly required.³⁹ Though Qohelet is not an Epicurean or literarily influenced by Epicureanism, his empirical observations and experiences orient him to a logical process with regard to his morality that is remarkably similar to Epicureans' logic. As I argued, Qohelet's realization of the same fate overturns the whole value system of Judaism he once upheld. For the rational Qohelet, therefore, there is no compelling reason to offer sacrifice, to be clean, to be good, to

38 Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:58. See also Brunschwig and Sedley, "Hellenistic Philosophy," 159–60, 163.

39 For Epicurean ethics, see chap. 4, pp. 92–93.

be righteous, or even to be wise since the same fate befalls all. The rational Qohelet in Eccl 3:19–21 even reveals his doubt about human's privilege over animals. This doubt is significant because the rational Qohelet understands that humans are like animals, which are surely not obliged to any moral conduct or a life of virtue. Without finding any compelling reason or evidence that wisdom's way or a life of virtue is ultimately what God cares about, Qohelet becomes a promoter of pleasure and individual happiness: eating, drinking, and experiencing anything good, including sexual pleasure.⁴⁰

Like Qohelet's all other utterances discussed before, however, his discourse of wisdom and pleasure too is double-voiced. Just because Qohelet sometimes prioritizes pleasure over everything, Qohelet cannot become a libertine nor his ideas can be anti-social. Qohelet is a sage who wants to protect his identity and his way of life. Therefore, even in his rational voice's claims, such as Eccl 3:22 and 8:15, the sage side of Qohelet is not unconscious but speaks together, layering under the rational voice with bitter irony. Particularly in Eccl 8:15, the Father's voice affects Qohelet much more strongly or explicitly than in Eccl 3:22. Notice, at the end of his praise of pleasure in this passage, the Father's voice in Qohelet's consciousness also makes him add comments: "[eating, drinking, and enjoying] will accompany them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun." Even when the rational Qohelet promotes individual happiness and pleasure, the sage Qohelet claims that God is in control of everything. Because of this sage voice in Qohelet's consciousness, Qohelet cannot merely be a detached observer. Unlike Epicureans, who do not regret to see anti-teleological world, the sage Qohelet cannot just joyfully announce his rational conclusion—pleasure is the best—but color his words with sighs and distress caused by questions about the Father's voice's teaching, especially about God's justice. But the sage Qohelet also hopes to see

40 Ecclesiastes 9:9 is the passage that alludes to the idea that sexual pleasure is a part of "good experiences." Qohelet, however, does not mean that one can have sexual pleasure with just any partner but someone who he or she loves. Thus, the passage likely refers to the happiness that a successful marriage can provide. Cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 305–06; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 294. In terms of Qohelet's promotion of joy in general, Whybray understands that Qohelet's *carpe diem* advice is rooted in his fundamentally positive view on life since Qohelet claims that "a living dog is better than a dead lion" (9:4). However, his negative view on life is equally clearly stated in his claim that the dead are better than the living; and even better is not to be born at all. (4:2–3). Qohelet also claims that the stillborn are better than the ones who cannot enjoy life (6:3). The absurdity affirmed by the same fate that indiscriminately happens to all is too great for Qohelet to claim that there still is hope in life. Therefore, Qohelet's promotion of joy rather emerges out of his disbelief in God's justice. For Whybray's argument, see Whybray, "Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy," 87–98.

God's ultimate justice. This ongoing internal struggle in Qohelet's consciousness never ceases in his dialogized interior monologue, and makes the rational voice's strong claims unfinalizable.

3.1 *The Father's Voice in the Rational Qohelet's Promotion of Pleasure*

We just saw that Qohelet at times seems to be a typical sage who regards wisdom to be one's purpose of life regardless of its consequences, but he also promotes an idea that wisdom is useless unless it gives the wise proper benefits. The passages discussed above relatively clearly show which dialogic voices mainly affect Qohelet's consciousness even though his interior monologue is ultimately layered by multiple voices. In some other passages, however, Qohelet not only promotes individual happiness and pleasure, but also explicitly reveals his sage characteristics. For example, the passages in Eccl 2:18–21 and 6:1–2 particularly well unveil how the rational Qohelet happens to promote a pleasure-seeking life so strongly and frequently in Ecclesiastes. In those utterances, however, Qohelet also exhibits his sage characteristics acknowledging wisdom's beneficial consequences. These words signal that multiple voices simultaneously construct his consciousness. The passages read:

(18) ושנאתי אני את-כל-עמלי שאני עמל תחת השמש שאניחנו לאדם שיהיה אחרי
 (19) ומי יודע החכם יהיה או סכל וישלט בכל-עמלי שעמלתי ושחכמתי תחת השמש
 גם-זה הבל
 (20) וסבותי אני ליאש את-לבי על כל-העמל שעמלתי תחת השמש
 (21) כִּי־יש אדם שעמלו בחכמה ובדעת ובכשרון ולאדם שלא עמל-בו יתננו חלקו גם-
 זה הבל ורעה רבה (Eccl 2:18–21)

(18) I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me

(19) and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is absurd.

(20) And I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labors under the sun.

(21) Indeed, sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is absurd and a great evil. (NRSV with my modifications)

(1) יש רעה אשר ראיתי תחת השמש ורבה היא על-האדם

(2) אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִתְּנֶה לֹא־יִשְׁלִיטֵנוּ הָאֱלֹהִים לֹא־כָל מִמּוֹנוֹ כִּי אִישׁ נִכְרִי יֵאָכְלֵנוּ זֶה הַבֶּל וְחִלִּי
רַע הוּא (Eccl 6:1–2)

(1) There is a misfortune that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy upon humankind:

(2) those to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that they lack nothing of all that they desire, yet God does not enable them to enjoy these things, but a stranger enjoys them. This is absurd and a grievous evil. (NRSV with my modifications)

In Eccl 2:18–21, the rational Qohelet expresses his deep frustration about an absurd event that he and many others experience; that is, the wise sometimes can not fully enjoy the fruits of their wisdom but others do, possibly fools.⁴¹ His complaint is intense: “I hated all my toil” (v. 18). In Eccl 2:14b–17, we already saw Qohelet’s intense rhetoric, “I hated life,” that shows his painful recognition of everyone’s same fate, including his own. Here again, the rational Qohelet says that he *hates* all his toil (v. 18) and let his heart despair (v. 20) because he will eventually leave his wisdom achievement to a stranger without being able to fully enjoy his achievement. Qohelet’s personal experiences of absurd life events increasingly reinforce an ideological position that counteracts the wisdom ideology as it prioritizes individual happiness over wisdom.

What is notable in Eccl 2:18–21 is that Qohelet does not completely deny wisdom’s beneficial consequences even though his words here ultimately oppose the Father’s voice’s wisdom ideology. Though Qohelet shows his active involvement with a discourse of individual happiness, the Father’s voice also affects his consciousness. According to v. 21, he acknowledges that the wise like himself toil with wisdom, knowledge, and skill and make great achievement or yield certain beneficial products that may benefit others. When Qohelet more strongly reflects the voice of Rational Intellect, he rather claims that good or bad things happen arbitrarily instead of as consequences of wisdom or foolishness. For example, according to Eccl 9:11, Qohelet states that “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the learned ones.” Unlike Eccl 9:11, Qohelet, here in Eccl 2:18–21, partly acknowledges wisdom’s benefits. The voices in Qohelet’s

⁴¹ According to Eccl 2:10, it is not that Qohelet never had a chance to enjoy his works of wisdom. Qohelet states that he found pleasure in all his toil, but, in Eccl 2:18, he still complains that he eventually has to yield all the benefits of his wisdom and achievement to others.

consciousness are not merely conflicting here but also interpenetrating each other authoring an unforeseen Qohelet, neither a typical sage nor a purely secular-rational thinker; or both a sage and rational thinker; an unpredictable and unfinalizable person. Then, we must be aware that under the layer of the rational Qohelet's voice, which promotes individual happiness and pleasure in Eccl 2:18–21, there is another layer that rings the Father's voice, which ironically believes that wisdom itself is the ultimate benefit, worth more than anything else in human life. Qohelet, in this passage, seemingly promotes a pleasure-seeking life by way of complaining about the lack of joy in his wisdom and achievement, but we can also see that somewhere deep down in his consciousness, the Father's voice, surviving the influence of the voice of Rational Intellect, tries to find a way to express the idea that, regardless of the consequences of wisdom, one must celebrate wisdom itself.

Ecclesiastes 6:1–2 also betrays how Qohelet becomes a person who so strongly promotes a pleasure-seeking life in Ecclesiastes. Like the passage in Eccl 2:18–21, however, Eccl 6:1–2 also displays Qohelet's in-between characteristics as Qohelet acknowledges God's control over everything, which is an idea of typical sages rather than secular, rational philosophers. Primarily, the passage in Eccl 6:2 discloses a case in which someone's (or his) wealth, possessions, and honor fulfill a stranger more than the original possessor of those items. The identity of the ones who receive such gifts (of God) are not explicitly stated, but we should assume that they are the wise. Qohelet as a sage considers wealth, possessions, and honor as consequences of wisdom as he frequently indicates that everything that he obtained is from his wisdom (1:13, 16, 17; 2:3, 9, 12). As Ogden also points out, "some within the wisdom tradition ... held firmly to the notion that material success, tangible possessions, evidenced divine blessing which was the consequence of living in a manner pleasing to God," but Qohelet here "place[s] a large question mark alongside such thinking."⁴² Therefore, the ones who receive wealth, possessions, and honor in Eccl 6:2 are supposed to be the wise like Qohelet. In fact, the passage, Eccl 6:1–2, alludes back to the passage in Eccl 2:18–21 and additionally to Eccl 2:4–9a in which Qohelet talks about his own experiences. According to Eccl 2:4–9a and 2:18–21, wealth, possessions, and honor are what Qohelet allegedly acquired with his wisdom though he could not fully enjoy them. In terms of wealth and possessions, he says he had houses and vineyards (2:4); gardens, parks and all kinds of tress (2:5); irrigation systems (2:6); slaves, herds, and flocks (2:7); and silver, gold, and treasure (2:8). In terms of honor, Qohelet says, "I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem" (2:9a

⁴² Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 97.

NRSV). In Eccl 6:2, Qohelet asserts that God absurdly does not allow people to enjoy what God gives, such as wealth, possessions, and honor. Ecclesiastes 6:1–2, therefore, is a generalized statement of his own absurd life experience that he mentioned in Eccl 2:4–9a and 2:18–21. And this is precisely why the rational Qohelet is so much disturbed and tries to promote a pleasure-seeking life. The rational Qohelet notices that the wise is sometimes unable to enjoy wisdom's benefits while others, possibly fools, do.

As mentioned, however, the Father's voice also significantly affects the rational Qohelet's words in Eccl 6:1–2. Qohelet, for example, acknowledges that it is no one else but God who gives wealth, possessions, and honor. The idea that God is in control of everything is a point that any typical sage would agree with. But Qohelet oddly comments that it is also God who does not allow people to enjoy those blessings. Like the passage in 2:18–21, two conflicting voices once again author Qohelet's consciousness creating an unforeseen Qohelet. Thus, it is unclear for the reader which voice is, in fact, the more powerful dialogic influence on Qohelet's utterances in Eccl 6:1–2. As the voices interpenetrate each other, Qohelet's utterances flow in an unexpected direction that makes Qohelet even more provocative. Attributing all the absurdities, as well as certain blessings, to God is something neither the voice of Rational Intellect nor the Father's voice would alone do. This unexpected and unforeseen Qohelet is not a Qohelet who merely speaks like the "father" in Proverbs or a rational thinker of Hellenistic philosophical schools. He is unfinalizably "becoming" something that he himself even cannot foretell.

Ecclesiastes 9:14–10:1 provides a further helpful example that also demonstratively shows how deeply Qohelet is involved with discourses that strongly promote individual happiness. Again, although mainly the voice of Rational Intellect affects Qohelet's words—especially Hellenistic philosophical schools that promote individual happiness—the Father's voice simultaneously affects his consciousness significantly. The passage reads:

(14) עֵיר קִטְנָה וְאִנְשִׁים בָּהּ מֵעַט וּבְאֵלֶּיהָ מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל וְסִבֵּב אֶתָּה וּבְנָה עֲלֶיהָ מִצּוּדִים
גְּדִלִים

(15) וּמֵצֵא בָּהּ אִישׁ מִסְכֵּן חֹכֵם וּמִלְטָהוּא אֶת־הָעִיר בַּחֲכַמְתּוֹ וְאָדָם לֹא זָכַר אֶת־הָאִישׁ
הַמִּסְכֵּן הַהוּא

(16a) וְאָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי טוֹבָה חֲכָמָה מִגְּבוּרָה

(16b) וְחֲכַמְתָּ הַמִּסְכֵּן בְּזוּיָהּ וּדְבַרְיוֹ אֵינָם נִשְׁמָעִים

(17) דְּבַרֵּי חֲכָמִים בִּנְחַת נִשְׁמָעִים מִזַּעֲקַת מוֹשֵׁל בַּכְּסִילִים

(18a) טוֹבָה חֲכָמָה מִכְּלִי קֶרֶב

(18b) וְחוּטָא אֶחָד יֵאָבֵד טוֹבָה הִרְבָּה

(10:1) זבובי מות⁴³ יבאיש יביע⁴⁴ שמן רוקח יקר מחכמה מכבוד סכלות מעט

(14) There was a little city with few people in it. A great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it.

(15) Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom saved the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man.

(16a) So I said, "Wisdom is better than might;"

(16b) "yet the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heeded."⁴⁵

(17) The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

(18a) Wisdom is better than weapons of war

(18b) but one bungler destroys much good.

(10:1) A dead fly turns the perfumer's oil in a vessel rancid; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. (NRSV with my modifications)

In this anecdote, Qohelet offers an interesting story of a poor wise man. This man saves a city from a mighty king's siege, but he is, then, absurdly forgotten with no proper rewards for his heroic wisdom. The overall impression that the passage provides is that the rational Qohelet is speaking here to reject one of the core teachings of the Father's voice, the necessity of one's commitment to wisdom's way, which ought to result in benefits that contribute to well-being. Through this short story of a wise man, the rational Qohelet raises a

43 The phrase is literally "flies of death," but מות after a construct noun can be rendered "deadly." Similar cases are found in 1 Sam 5:11 (deadly panic), 2 Sam 22:5 (deadly waves), and 2 Sam 22:6 (deadly snare). Thus, Fox argues that זבובי מות should be rendered "deadly flies," but, for Fox, this rendering does not make sense because "flies are not deadly." Instead of reading the phrase as is, Fox, thus, suggests to divide the consonants of the phrase—מות זבובי—as follows: מות זבוב ימות, and then understands it as "a fly dies." This reading makes the subject (זבוב) singular, and it agrees with a masculine singular form of the verb יבאיש. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 301. For the same reason, Seow emends the phrase as Fox does but translates as "a fly that dies," which can simply be understood as "a dead fly." See also Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 311.

44 The term יביע is problematic. Taking it as a hiphil form of נבע, Crenshaw reads the first half of the verse as follows: "dead flies corrupt and ferment the perfumer's oil." Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 168. However, a fly never ferments anything. Syr suggests that the word might have been originally גביע, that is, vessel. Then, Eccl 10:1a may read: "a dead fly turns a perfumer's oil in a vessel rancid." Also note that some ancient versions, such as Vulgate, Targum, and Symmachus, omit יביע as dittography. The translation above reflects Syr version.

45 NRSV uses the quotations marks in v. 16 (both 16a and 16b) to indicate that those words in quotation marks are Qohelet's direct speech.

question, “What is wisdom good for if it does not benefit the wise themselves or make them happy but only others?” After unfolding the story in Eccl 9:14–15, the Father’s voice and the voice of Rational Intellect appear alternating with each other as if the voices are having a dialogue expressing their own ideological ideas. In his dialogized interior monologue, Qohelet offers contradictory reflections on the story.

Especially in Eccl 9:16b, 18b and 10:1, Qohelet’s rationality prevails. For example, according to v. 16b, Qohelet states that the wise man was not properly rewarded at the end but rather his wisdom was “despised” (בזויה), and his words were not heeded (אינם נשמעים). For some scholars including Crenshaw and Seow, v. 16b indicates that the wise man’s wisdom was, in fact, never heeded, and, therefore, he did not even have a chance to save the city.⁴⁶ However, all verbs in the narrative in Eccl 9:14–15 are written in the perfect to indicate completed actions, which are usually taken as past tense.⁴⁷ In other words, the verb מלט in v. 15 should be rendered “he saved” since it is in the *piel* perfect form. Moreover, the sage Qohelet’s words in vv. 16a and 17 also confirm that the poor wise man actually saved the city. For example, in v. 16a, the sage Qohelet’s claim, “wisdom is better than might,” implicitly indicates that the wise man, in fact, saved the city with his mighty wisdom. In v. 17, the sage Qohelet states that the quiet words of wise one are better heard than a ruler’s loud voice. Thus, he once again implies that the people in the city heard the wisdom words of the poor wise person to escape from the crisis they were confronting, at least at that very moment. As Fox puts it, the wise man was “ignored” after he saved the city because he was merely a poor person.⁴⁸ Thus, what v. 16b indicates is that no one in the city remembered the wise man’s wisdom by not hearing the wise man’s words afterward. This absurdity is what the rational Qohelet tries to portray in this story to ultimately argue why nothing is better than pleasure or individual happiness. For the rational Qohelet, wisdom’s worth is not the highest or absolute good; rather its goodness depends on its faculties of benefiting the subjects of wise actions. Though the rational Qohelet does not explicitly commend pleasure or individual happiness here, he apparently exhibits his preference for individual happiness over wisdom’s way.

46 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 167; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 306.

47 One of special linguistic features in Ecclesiastes, which scholars often take as signs of LBH, is the rarity of imperfect consecutive in a narrative context. In this narrative sequence (9:14–15), only perfect conjugations are used. For a detailed discussion on imperfect consecutive in Ecclesiastes, see Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 1:86–87.

48 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 300.

However, as vv. 16a, 17 and 18a show, the Father's voice is still present in Qohelet's consciousness complicating the rational Qohelet's words: the poor wise man saves not only his own life but also the entire population of his city from the attack of a great foreign king.⁴⁹ The benefit of wisdom that the sage Qohelet describes here surpasses merely fulfilling individual interests. In fact, the poor wise man's heroic achievement can be understood as a prominent example of an act that testifies to the virtuous life of the wise, which is what the Father's voice would ultimately want Qohelet to pursue whether or not such an action is rewarded. Moreover, the story trumpets the power of wisdom as something that exceeds the physical strength or might (גבורה) of a warrior. Wisdom, not might, saves; it is most valuable for promoting life. Such an idea is, of course, well founded in the Father's teachings rather than in rational discourses. For example, Prov 8:14 says that if one has wisdom (חכמה), one also has strength (גבורה). Similarly, in Prov 24:5, wisdom is also compared with might (עז) or strength (כח). In Prov 21:22, wisdom is described as having the power to break down (וירד) a city of warriors (עיר גברים). Also the passages in Prov 20:18 and 24:6 claim that victory in war relies on wisdom or wise guidance. What all these passages indicate is that the Father's voice is a significant part of Qohelet's utterances about the poor wise man.

Thus, what is interesting about this unit is that even in the rational Qohelet's attempt to refute the Father's voice, the sage Qohelet does not disappear but reveals his belief about wisdom's power that even saves a city from a mighty foreign king. In other words, the Father's voice interacts with the voice of Rational Intellect in Qohelet's consciousness, and the rational Qohelet cannot completely disallow the interference of the Father's voice in his utterances. Thus, the rational Qohelet does not completely deny wisdom's power but points out a case where wisdom fails to benefit the wise themselves. From the perspective of the Father's voice, absurd events can always happen in reality, but that should be no reason for the wise to be disappointed and abandon wisdom's way or a life of virtue. The purpose of obtaining wisdom for the Father's voice is ultimately not a personal prosperity or security but wisdom's way or a life of virtue. Doing socially beneficial deeds—performing wisdom—is a primary virtue of traditional wisdom though it also ought to result in some genuine rewards. Moreover, according to Prov 11:20, the ones who choose wisdom's

49 Many scholars attempted to find a historical event that underlies the story, but it does not seem to be based on a real historical event. Thus, Gordis states that "most probably Koheleth is inventing a typical case (or generalizing) in order to illustrate his point, rather than invoking a specific historical incident." For the quote and the summary of the works that tried to identify the story with actual historical events, see Gordis, *Koheleth, the Man and His World*, 299.

way become God's "delight" (רצונו); that is, wisdom is supremely valuable. Ironically, however, the rational Qohelet disputes with his sage consciousness arguing that it is better to pursue personal happiness than to save a city and be completely forgotten without any reward. The conflicting voices are interpenetrating each other shaping unpredictable and unforeseen characteristics of Qohelet.

4 Qohelet's Contradictory Discourse of Wisdom's Accessibility

Previously, I discussed the contradictions centering around Qohelet's discourse of wisdom's benefits and God's justice, and we saw how multiple voices are dialogized in his words interpenetrating each other in his consciousness. Another important topic, in which multiple voices in Qohelet's consciousness interact one another generating a dialogized interior monologue, is wisdom's accessibility. Although the sage Qohelet does not explicitly state that wisdom is accessible, his assertion of wisdom's benefits in the passages discussed above suggests his belief about wisdom's accessibility (Eccl 2:13–14a; 8:5b–6a; 9:15a, 16a, 17, 18a; 10:12–13). Especially in the royal fiction (Eccl 1:12–2:26)—a report of Qohelet's extensive wisdom enterprise—the sage Qohelet boasts of his superiority in wisdom, along with all his alleged wisdom achievement, which clearly implies his presupposition of wisdom's accessibility. For example, in Eccl 1:16, Qohelet says, "Behold, I greatly increased wisdom over all who were before me over Jerusalem" (אני הנה הגדלתי והוספתי חכמה על כלי-). Bearing the sage Qohelet's positive view on wisdom's accessibility in our mind, we, now, need to explore his denial of wisdom's accessibility to see how Qohelet's monologue on this matter is dialogized by multiple voices that interact with one another in his consciousness.

Concerning Qohelet's denial of wisdom's accessibility, Eccl 7:23–8:1a is a particularly important passage.⁵⁰ In this passage, Qohelet explicitly claims his

⁵⁰ According to Fox and Porten, many scholars, including Delitzsch, Barton, Budde, Pödehard, Gordis, Barucq, and Zimmerli, close the unit at Eccl 7:29 not 8:1, but Hertzberg, Galling, and Ellermeier set Eccl 8:1 as part of the unit. Michael V. Fox and Bezael Porten, "Unsought Discoveries: Qohelet 7:23–8:1a," *HS* 19 (1978): 26–38. As indicated, since I see the unit as mainly about wisdom's accessibility to which Eccl 8:1a well fit, my analysis includes Eccl 8:1a. But according to Seow, Eccl 8:1–17 (or 8:2–17) begins and ends with the idea that no one knows the work of God, which is also closely related to the topic of wisdom's accessibility. In this respect, while I would include 8:1a in the unit of 7:23–8:1a for my discussion, Eccl 8:1a seems to be able to bridge the two consecutive units and can be included in both units. See Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 290.

lack of wisdom as well as humans' inaccessibility to wisdom in general, disputing everything that he had spoken both as a sage and a rational thinker. The passage reads as follows:

- (23) כל־זוה נסיתי בחכמה אמרתי אחכמה והיא רחוקה ממני
 (24) רחוק מה־שהיה ועמק עמק מי ימצאנו⁵¹
 (25) סבתי אני ולבי לדעת ולתור ובקש חכמה וחשבון ולדעת רשע כסל והסכלות
 הוללות
 (26) ומוצא אני מר ממות את־האשה אשר־היא מצודים וחרמים לבה אסורים ידיה טוב
 לפני האלהים ימלט ממנה וחוטא ילכד בה
 (27) ראה זה מצאתי אמרה קהלת אחת לאחת למצא חשבון
 (28) אשר עוד־בקשה נפשי ולא מצאתי אדם אחד מאלף מצאתי⁵² ואשה בכל־אלה
 לא מצאתי
 (29) לבד ראה־זה מצאתי אשר עשה האלהים את־האדם ישר והמה בקשו חשבנות
 רבים
 (8:1a) מי כהחכם ומי יודע פשר דבר (Eccl 7:23–8:1a)

(23) All this I have tested by wisdom; I said “let me be wise,” but it was far from me.

(24) Whatever happened was far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

(25) I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and explanation, and to know that wickedness is folly and that foolishness is madness.

(26) I found more bitter than death the woman because she is “nets,” and her heart is “snares.” Her hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.

51 The meaning of v. 24a is not quite clear due to its syntax. It says מה־שהיה רחוק, literally, “far is something that happened” or “what happened is far.” As discussed in chapter three p. 63, Qohelet uses מה as an indefinite pronoun often with relative pronoun ש. The expression, מה־שהיה, is frequently found in Qohelet's utterances, and those passages can throw light on the meaning of v. 24a. In Eccl 3:1–15, Qohelet claims that there is an appointed time for every matter, and what happened (מה־שהיה) is what will happen (3:15). Also in 3:22; 6:10; 8:7; and 10:14, the expressions מה־שהיה and מה־שיהיה are used to either affirm the *knowledge* of “what happened is what will happen” or indicate “no one knows what will happen.” In sum, the phrase, מה־שהיה, is used in contexts where *knowledge* of what is happening in the world is in question.

52 The word מצא appears intensively in vv. 27–28, and there is a chance that מצאתי here might have been inserted inadvertently as dittography. The translation above reflects such an emendation. I offer a full discussion of this emendation later in this chapter. See pp. 213–14 below.

- (27) See, this is what I found, said Qohelet, one by one, to find explanation,
 (28) which my mind has sought repeatedly. And I have not found one man among a thousand; and a woman among all these I have not found.
 (29) Only see this; I have found that God made human beings upright, but they have sought many contrivances.
 (8:1a) Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing?
 (NRSV with my modification)

The unit is filled with some troublesome elements that have attracted scholars' attention. What is especially problematic for modern scholars is, of course, Qohelet's negative claim about humans' accessibility to wisdom (vv. 23–25 and vv. 29–8:1a), which sharply contradicts Qohelet's bold claims about his superiority in wisdom. Qohelet's claim of his greatness in wisdom presupposes his belief about wisdom's accessibility. Thus, my first task in this section is to explain how such a contradiction arises in his consciousness in Bakhtin's terms. In the course of the discussion here, we will be able to see another dialogized interior monologue of Qohelet in which multiple voices interact with one another. Verses 26–28 are also problematic. Qohelet abruptly utters some misogynic words, which appear to be intrusive in this unit. Many consider vv. 26–28 to be a secondary gloss. It is, indeed, unclear how this misogynistic language is related to the text's questions about wisdom's accessibility. Thus, my other task is to explain the relevance of Qohelet's misogynic words to this context so that we can fully understand his misogynic words as his peculiar response to the question of wisdom's accessibility.

4.1 *Dialogic Emergence of Qohelet's Denial of Wisdom's Accessibility*

In Eccl 7:23–24, Qohelet announces humans' inaccessibility to wisdom. He claims that even though he tried to be wise, wisdom was far from him (אֲחַכְמָה וְהִיא רְחוּקָה מִמֶּנִּי), and whatever happens in the world is too "deep" to understand (רְחוּק מִה־שֵׂהִיָּה וְעֵמֶק עֵמֶק). And finally, he asks a rhetorical question, "Who can find it [wisdom] out?" (מִי יִמְצְאוֹ). Which voice most fully affects Qohelet's words here is not apparent because both the Father's voice and the voice of Rational Intellect normally would not claim wisdom's inaccessibility. The Father's voice of traditional wisdom, of course, would never deny the accessibility of wisdom. In Prov 8, for example, personified Woman Wisdom—a representation of God's transcendent wisdom—is described to be residing among humanity, crying out for humans' commitment to wisdom-loving. This means, as Fox puts it, that this wisdom is "not secretive, confining herself to a coterie

of initiates,” and no prerequisite is required to obtain wisdom.⁵³ Although the limitations of human intellectuality and moral understanding are acknowledged in Proverbs, its accessibility is never denied. If Qohelet is only under the dialogic influence of the Father's voice without the interference of any other dialogic voices, he would also never deny wisdom's accessibility.

Interestingly, however, the rational Qohelet also has no compelling reason to deny wisdom's accessibility unless he was most affected by Pyrrhonism, Academic skepticism, or other skeptical discourses. As we noticed, Qohelet came into dialogic contact more closely with other discourses, such as Epicureanism, rather than skeptical discourses. As Epicureans emphasize sensory knowledge, the rational Qohelet also stresses that his knowledge is accurate by repeatedly stating that he *saw* all the things about which he talks. For example, in Eccl 1:14–15, the rational Qohelet says, “I saw all the works that have been done under the sun” (ראיתי את כל־המעשים שנעשו תחת השמש), and he further speculates that the world is irrevocably “crooked” (מעוות לא־יוכל לתקן).⁵⁴ The rational Qohelet also saw numerous events that suggest how things happen arbitrarily in the world. As discussed, for example, in Eccl 9:11, he saw that “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the learned ones.” The rational voice in Qohelet's consciousness is a kind of force that generates propensity for intellectual exploration rather than something that makes him doubt his intellectual power itself.

Considering the characteristics of these voices, Qohelet's denial of wisdom's accessibility is unexpected. However, we already saw that Qohelet expresses not only contradictions but also unpredictable words, because multiple voices simultaneously construct Qohelet's subjectivity. Qohelet's denial of wisdom's accessibility is, in fact, another example that reveals such an unexpected and unforeseen Qohelet. No single voice in his consciousness would alone claim wisdom's inaccessibility.

53 Fox, *Proverbs* 1–9, 356 and 96.

54 See also Eccl 3:16; 4:1, 4, 15; 5:12, 17, 6:1–2; 7:15; 8:9–10; 9:11; 10:5–7. However, in the passages, Eccl 2:24; 3:10; 8:17; 9:13, Qohelet also uses the “I saw”-expression to affirm his religious beliefs even though religious beliefs are usually not matters of “seeing” or observation. For example, in Eccl 2:24, Qohelet reveals that he saw that eating, drinking, and pleasure are from the hand of God though it is not empirically verifiable. In such a case, Qohelet's use of the “I saw”-expression shows not empirical verification of his knowledge but justification of his religious belief. In this respect, the Father's voice, along with the voice of Rational Intellect, clearly affects the way Qohelet “sees” the world.

The Qohelet who denies wisdom's accessibility is, nonetheless, more closely tied to his sage side though significantly affected by the voice of Rational Intellect as well. As mentioned, in Eccl 1:15a, the rational Qohelet claims, "No one is able to straighten what is crooked" (מעות לא־יוכל לתקן). In other words, the rational Qohelet indicates that the world God created is crooked, and he believes that his observations are accurate. These empirical observations profoundly undermine the world that the Father's voice envisions. The sage Qohelet, of course, cannot accept this idea. The sage Qohelet is, however, very well aware of the discrepancy between the rhetoric of the wisdom-prosperity axiom and reality of the world because the sage Qohelet is also a rational observer and thinker. Therefore, the sage Qohelet, at times, cannot simply pretend as if the world he observes is working perfectly according to the divine order, nor can he completely accept the rationally arrived idea that God's creation is crooked. In his dialogic struggle, Qohelet as a sage is compelled to protect God's justice and the divine order. In order to find a way to avoid accusing God of leaving injustice untouched, the sage Qohelet redirects the question of the divine order to that of humans' ability to access wisdom. This redirection allows him to assert that the divine order adequately operates in the world and executes God's justice. In other words, the problem is not God or God's creation but humans' intellectual perversity. For the sage Qohelet, humans cannot observe the world's uprightness, because their intellectual perversity has disabled them from attaining "proper" wisdom, even though this denial of wisdom's accessibility is contradictory to the Father's voice itself.

In defense of God and the divine order, the sage Qohelet explains how humans lost their ability to arrive at true wisdom in Eccl 7:25–29. Particularly notable is Qohelet's use of a new word, חשבון, in vv. 25 and 27, that now negatively evaluates his own intellectual enterprise first reported in Eccl 1:12–2:26. As Krüger and Loader note, the passage, Eccl 7:23–8:1a, is another version of Qohelet's first report of his intellectual enterprise.⁵⁵ In Eccl 1:13a, for example, Qohelet says: "I set my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom everything that has been done under heaven" (ונתתי את־לבי לדרוש ולתור בחכמה על כל־אשר) (נעשה תחת השמים); and in Eccl 1:17a, Qohelet says, "I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly" (ואתנה לבי לדעת חכמה ודעת הוללות) (ושכלות). Now in Eccl 7:25, the sage Qohelet restates what he has done as follows: "I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek *wisdom* and *explanation* and to know that wickedness is folly and that foolishness is madness." (סבותי אני ולבי לדעת ולתור ובקש חכמה וחשבון ולדעת רשע כסל והסכלות הוללות). Only in the second report, the term חשבון appears to specify an aspect of his

55 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 143. See also Loader, *Ecclesiastes*, 91.

intellectual endeavor that he overlooked in the first report. In other words, the word חשבון is the key to the issue of how Qohelet becomes to deny wisdom's accessibility.

As we already noted in Eccl 7:23–24, Qohelet indicated that he tried to be wise but wisdom—חכמה—was far from him. In light of this statement, Qohelet's addition of a new word “explanation” (חשבון) in Eccl 7:25 implies that what he truly had is not חכמה but חשבון. Also in Eccl 7:27–28, Qohelet, using the word חשבון, states: “‘See, this is what I found,’ said Qohelet, ‘one by one, to find *explanation* which my mind has sought repeatedly’” (ראה זה מצאתי אמרה) (קהלת אחת לאחת למצא חשבון אשר עוד־בקשה נפשי). Though the Hebrew sentence can be variously translated or understood, the expressions, such as אחת לאחת (repeatedly) and חשבון (explanation), suggest that Qohelet particularizes his intellectual enterprise as something that explains things meticulously through repeated, rational, empirical examinations, which are distinct from חכמה, that is, true wisdom. As Eaton also aptly understands, Qohelet now recognizes his “wisdom” in “the mathematical and intellectual sense.”⁵⁶ According to Gordis, the term, חשבון, means “calculation, sum, conclusion, substance of thought.”⁵⁷ Seow understands the word חשבון to mean “accounting,” connoting “an intellectual accounting, that is, an explication of the events in the universe.”⁵⁸ In Fox's terms, Qohelet is using “arithmetical imagery.”⁵⁹ In other words, the sage Qohelet reduces his intellectuality from a broader and more comprehensive concept of “wisdom” to “explanation,” a specific and narrow concept of intellectual faculty.

In Eccl 7:29, the sage Qohelet points out what the problem of חשבון is. He says, “God made human beings upright, but they have sought many contrivances” (עשה האלהים את־האדם ישר והמה בקשו חשבנות רבים). In order to justify the worldview of the sages, this unforeseen Qohelet, authored by the dialogic interface of the Father's voice and the voice of Rational Intellect, claims that God created humans upright (ישר), but humans have deviated from the right path by seeking “contrivance” (חשבנות). Notice that the root of the word חשבנות is חשב (to think, devise, count, value, invent). The term חשב is also the root of the word חשבון, “intellectual accounting.” Using two similar words derived from the same root, the sage Qohelet allusively reveals that his חשבון is חשבנות, rather than, חכמה—true wisdom. Although חשבנות does not have genuinely negative connotations, Qohelet employs the word to criticize

⁵⁶ Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 115.

⁵⁷ Gordis, *Koheleth, the Man and His World*, 271.

⁵⁸ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 260–61.

⁵⁹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 270.

human inventions as intellectual perversity. According to Gordis, the word חשבנות means “contrivance” and “device,” which he takes as “a reference to human perversity as a whole.”⁶⁰ Similarly, Krüger also argues that Qohelet relates “the search for great knowledge” to humans’ loss of “straightforwardness” in Eccl 7:29.⁶¹ In sum, by employing the term חשבון in Eccl vv. 25 and 27, the sage Qohelet signals that there is something wrong with his intellectual enterprise, and in v. 29, he confirms that חשבון cannot be חכמה but חשבונות. The sage Qohelet asserts that the reason that humans cannot have access to full and genuine understanding of the world is their intellectual perversity that distances humans from true wisdom.

4.2 *Qohelet’s Misogynistic Language in a Wisdom’s Accessibility Discourse*

After claiming his lack of wisdom and specifying his intellectual capacity as חשבון rather than חכמה, the sage Qohelet, in Eccl 7:26, abruptly states that “the woman” (האשה) is more bitter than death (מות). In light of Qohelet’s denial of his wisdom and wisdom’s accessibility, this death may symbolize humans’ complete loss of true wisdom, since wisdom is also often considered to be “life” in traditional wisdom. What Eccl 7:26 thus seems to reveal is that the sage Qohelet attributes the symbolic death—the loss of wisdom—to “the woman.” Since, as discussed, the sage Qohelet attributes humans’ loss of wisdom to a perversion of human nature, to be regarded as something more bitter than “death,” the role of “the woman” should also be to alter human nature in terms of their intellectuality. Then, Eve (חוה) is, perhaps, the female character who can most adequately fill that role for the following reasons. First of all, “The woman” (האשה), to whom Adam gives a name “Eve” (חוה), is a key character of what is widely known as “the story of the Fall” (Gen 3) in which human nature irreversibly changes. In other words, האשה in Eccl 7:26 is literarily connected to האשה in Gen 2–3. Moreover, “the woman”—Eve in Gen 2–3—can be understood as a figure who is ultimately responsible for an alteration of human nature. If this change is viewed negatively, then the consequence of Eve’s actions is, indeed, a “distortion” or “perversion” of human nature. Thus, she deserves to be called, nets, snares, fetters, or even something more bitter than death as Qohelet calls her as such in Eccl 7:26. With this understanding

60 Gordis, *Koheleth, the Man and His World*, 271. This word in this form appears only in Eccl 7:29 and 2 Chr 26:15. See also *Ibid.*, 275.

61 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 149.

of Eve and her actions, Qohelet seems to use “the woman” as a symbolic reference to Eve to attribute the distortion of human intellectuality to Eve.

Of course, as Carol Meyers states, Eve’s sinful image is “more strongly colored by postbiblical culture than by the biblical narrative itself.”⁶² Meyers notes that Gen 3 does not use the word “sin” to describe Eve’s action, nor does the text suggest that she made Adam eat the fruit by seducing or tempting him.⁶³ According to Gen 3:6, “the woman”—Eve—simply gave the fruit to Adam, who was always with her when she was talking to the serpent; and he ate it (Gen 3:6). In fact, images of Eve are not altogether negative in ancient literary intellectual discourses. For example, Tob 8:6 states, “You [God] made Adam, and for him you made his wife Eve as a helper and support. From the two of them the human race has sprung” (NRSV). However, Qohelet seems to be in dialogic contact with a certain torah discourse that interprets Eve as a beginning of sin to which Ben Sira, a sage roughly contemporary to Qohelet, also seems to have been exposed. For example, in Sir 25:24, Ben Sira villainizes Eve as follows: “From a woman [ἀπὸ γυναικὸς] sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die” (NRSV).⁶⁴ Under the dialogic influence of this voice, which I would designate as “the voice from a Torah discourse,” which denounces “the woman”—Eve—and her actions, the sage Qohelet realizes that his intellectual perversity is the result of the distortion of human nature after the act of “the woman” Eve. The sage Qohelet considers himself and all humans as ones who were caught by the trap of “the woman” Eve. For Qohelet, as a consequence of Eve’s alteration of human nature, humans only seek חשבון; they have lost their accessibility to true wisdom.

For many scholars, nonetheless, it is probably not apparent that Qohelet uses the word האשה in v. 26 to refer to Eve, because האשה is a generic term that means “the woman/wife” in most contexts of the Hebrew Bible.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, other aspects of Qohelet’s words in this unit quite impressively allude to Genesis.⁶⁶ Fox and Bezael Porten, for example, helpfully explain

62 *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, Wm. B. Eerdmans’s ed., s.v. “Eve.”

63 Ibid.

64 Here, also note that Ben Sira uses “a woman” (γυνή) to designate Eve as Qohelet uses האשה.

65 Noticing that Qohelet’s words about “woman” as a new topic, Gordis even separates vv. 26–29 from its preceding topics. The preceding topic that Gordis notices is “the ‘golden mean’” (vv. 15–25). Gordis, *Koheleth, the Man and His World*, 168–71.

66 Krüger also believes that the passage and Gen 3, 4:17–22; 6:5 have commonalities. Krüger, *Koheleth*, 149. For Forman and Dell in their own works, Ecclesiastes and Gen 1–11 are

how Qohelet's words in Eccl 7:23–8:1a are analogous to the story in Gen 2–3.⁶⁷ For example, (1) Qohelet, in Eccl 7:23–8:1a, uses the word אדם (man/Adam) instead of a much more common word איש (man) as a counterpart of אשה (woman/Eve) as in Gen 2–3; (2) Qohelet describes woman as a trap for man as Eve can be considered to be as such for Adam. Moreover, (3) in v. 25, Qohelet reports that he tried to know חכמה (wisdom) and סכלות and הוללות (folly and foolishness), which may represent something good and bad/evil respectively, and hence it reminds the reader of the image of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis; and (4) Qohelet considers creation to be upright just as it is in Genesis. In this light, we can recognize Eve as a plausible connotation of “the woman” (האשה) in addition to its literal meaning. Under the dialogic influence of the voice from a Torah discourse, the sage Qohelet uses “the woman” to refer to Eve.

Qohelet's allusion to Eve in Eccl 7:26 becomes clearer if we consider that the alteration of human nature that Eve's actions caused is, in fact, tightly related to intellectual perversity rather than moral depravities. In the so-called “story of the Fall,” what Eve desired is *knowledge*. In 1 Kgs 3:9–10, Solomon pleases God by asking God for wisdom, an ability “to discern between good and evil” (להבין בין טוב לרע), which is an essential quality or wisdom for a king to govern a nation in justice. What Eve desired is described by the same words. In Gen 2:17, God designates the forbidden tree as “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (עץ הדעת טוב ורע). The serpent in Gen 3:5 also says that the forbidden fruit will enable Eve to know good and evil (ידעי טוב ורע). In other words, Eve attempted to acquire wisdom.⁶⁸ According to Newsom, Gen 2–3 is not just about the fall of humankind but about “what it means to be human” and “the birth of humans and the birth of culture.”⁶⁹ In other words, as Newsom argues, it is the

linked. Forman, “Kohleth's Use of Genesis,” 256–63; Dell, “Exploring Intertextual Links,” 3–14.

67 Fox and Porten, “Unsought Discoveries: Qohelet 7:23–8:1a,” 26–38.

68 Considering the fact that ancient writers often connect wisdom with goddesses, which is also evident in Prov 8, connecting Eve with wisdom may have developed out of such a context. For more information about the ancient wisdom-goddess motif, See W. F. Albright, “The Goddess of Life and Wisdom,” *AJSL* 36, no. 4 (1920): 258–94.

69 Carol A. Newsom, “Genesis 2–3 and 1 Enoch 6–16: Two Myths of Origin and Their Ethical Implications,” in *Shaking Heaven and Earth: Essays in Honor of Walter Brueggemann and Charles B. Cousar*, ed. Christine Roy Yoder, M. Kathleen O'Connor, E. Elizabeth Johnson, and Stanley P. Saunders (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 9–10. Newsom notices that the two boundaries are not clearly set in the creation narrative before Eve and Adam eat the forbidden fruit. In other words, the awareness of the nakedness of themselves implies that they start being distinguished from animals, but they do not become divine because they are permanently forbidden to eat the tree of life and to have

story about the boundaries between animals and humans as well as the divine and the human.⁷⁰ For Newsom, the most crucial element in the process of the birth of the true human in Gen 2–3 is Eve's desire for knowledge, a desire that inspired her to cross the boundary of pre-human condition.⁷¹ In this respect, האשה in the Genesis creation story is a woman of wisdom, who dared to pursue intellectual exploration about which Adam plays an utterly passive role. But, the story in Gen 3 also reveals that acquiring this wisdom is forbidden. Qohelet thus seems to understand Eve's actions not only as a pursuit of knowledge with which he also was preoccupied, but also as disobedience, which caused the distortion of human intellectuality. Under the dialogic influence of the voice from a Torah discourse, the sage Qohelet painfully acknowledges that humans lost their ability to arrive at true wisdom because of האשה, that is, Eve. However, he is somewhat satisfied with this understanding of wisdom's inaccessibility because, through it, he is also able to defend God's justice by attributing his observations of the absurdities of the world not to the divine, but to human intellectual perversion.

The Torah voice in Eccl 7:23–8:1a that villainizes Eve and her actions plays a significant role in Qohelet's defense of God's justice and the divine order. At the same time, he is also under the dialogic influence of the Father's voice. As noted, in Eccl 7:26, the sage Qohelet re-creates the Father's voice by comparing האשה with “nets” (מצודים), “snares” (חרמים), and “fetters” (אסורים), which “catch” (לכד) humans. Though Proverbs does not routinely use the three words above except for לכד, it frequently employs the same hunting or slaughtered animal imagery to warn of the danger of folly, especially the danger of the so-called “strange woman” (אשה זרה). Those metaphorical words in Proverbs include: “to catch” (לכד), “to snare” (יקש), “arrow” (חץ), “trap” (פח), “snare” (מוקש), “pit” (שוחה), and “fowler” (יקוש).⁷² Also in Proverbs, the ones who are vulnerable to the “trap” are compared to animals, such as “bird” (צפור), “gazelle” (צבי), “ox” (שור), and “stag” (עכס). Proverbs 7:23b provides a good example: “Like a bird rushing into a trap, he does not know that it [following the ‘strange woman;’ cf. Prov 7:5] will cost him his life” (כמהר צפור אלי־פח ולא־ידע כי־בנפשו הוא). For many scholars, therefore, Qohelet's words here are strongly reminiscent of the “strange woman” (אשה זרה), a personification of folly, a seductive figure who entices young men to deviate from the right path (Prov 2:16–19; 5:3–6;

immortality. Their eyes were opened to know good and evil, and, therefore, humans became fully humans.

70 Ibid., 10.

71 Ibid.

72 See Prov 5:22; 6:2; 6:5; 7:22–23; 22:5; 11:6; 12:13; 18:7; 20:25; 22:14; 23:27; 29:6.

7:6–26; 9:13–18; 22:14).⁷³ She is an opponent of Woman Wisdom. The fact that Qohelet's language resembles the often used metaphors in Proverbs suggests that Qohelet here speaks under the dialogic influence of the Father's voice. In defense of God's justice, the sage Qohelet considers his rational intellectual exploration as just reckoning or a mere kind of calculation that is not true wisdom but, rather, folly or *האשה* that caught him like nets, snares, and fetters.

Since the voice from a Torah discourse simultaneously affects Qohelet's words in Eccl 7:23–8:1a, the sage Qohelet's utterance here is not without Qohelet's peculiar accents. To defend God's justice, the two voices are cooperating with each other against the rational voice in Qohelet's consciousness once again generating an unforeseen Qohelet. As mentioned, the Father's voice normally would not deny wisdom's accessibility. Proverbs uses hunting or slaughtered animal imagery to warn of the danger of folly rather than to express the inevitability of humans' genuine foolishness and sinfulness, their inability to attain wisdom. In Proverbs, it is not impossible for "the son" to escape from the strange woman and to become "wise." This Qohelet, as he is affected by both the voice of a Torah discourse and the Father's voice, however, denies such a possibility. Although, in Eccl 7:26, Qohelet seems to acknowledge the possibility of escaping from the trap of "the woman," by stating, "one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her," he, at this moment, does not genuinely entertain the possibility that there can be a truly wise "man" who can escape from Eve's trap. This unforeseen Qohelet in Eccl 7:23–24 realizes that his wisdom was not true wisdom, even though Qohelet, at times, like in Eccl 1:6, believes that no one has ever been wiser than himself in Jerusalem. If the wisest person like Qohelet cannot escape from the trap of displeasing God, how much more would those who are less wise than him or even foolish be vulnerable to the "trap" in Qohelet's mind? Moreover, as Seow aptly notices, the impossibility to escape from the trap of "the woman" should be understood in light of Eccl 7:20, in which Qohelet says, "Surely there is no one on earth so righteous as to do good without ever sinning" (*כי אדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא*). For Seow, "apparently in the author's judgment, no one escapes from Folly-Wickedness."⁷⁴ Qohelet is not merely talking about the rarity of wisdom. He, rather, recognizes the human intellectual perversity and denies the possibility for any human to have access to true wisdom that helps them understand ways to please God.

73 The scholars who consider *האשה* as the "strange woman" include Loader, Seow, Fox, and Brown. See Loader, *Ecclesiastes*, 92; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 271–72; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 269; Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 83.

74 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 272.

An important common aspect of these voices that cooperate in Qohelet's consciousness to deny wisdom's accessibility is their ideological stance. Both the voice from a Torah discourse and the Father's voice ultimately try to direct human behaviors and mind by means of controlling knowledge based on religious ideology rather than by empirically proving God's justice. In fact, defending God's justice and remaining faithful to God are perhaps one of the most common theological reactions to social injustice found in the Hebrew Bible. As Crenshaw analyzes, biblical writers try to defend God's justice using various theological strategies, and these strategies clearly intend to influence their addressees ideologically. For example, according to Crenshaw, we must believe absurd events in the word as a test from God (God's test of Abraham in Gen 22 and of Job in the Book of Job); or as a punishment for sin (the perspectives of the four friends of Job and deuteronomistic history).⁷⁵ As we saw, the Father's voice prioritizes submission over individual intellectuality and makes Qohelet believe that the Father's voice's teaching—the world is working properly—is reliable while his own observations are not. The voice that defends God's justice in Ecclesiastes does not attempt to prove their empirical truthfulness of its claims but rather require their addressees to submit to the religious ideology, confess their belief, and remain faithful to God.

Also, the voice from a Torah discourse that villainizes Eve and her actions is not merely a misogynistic voice, but a voice that prioritizes God's commandments over human intellectuality and hence might also mitigate the voice of Rational Intellect. The passage in Num 15:39 illumines the Torah voice's ideological stance about human intellect: "do not follow your heart and your eyes for following them is your fornication" (ולא־תתרו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם) (אשר־אתם זנים אחריהם). Note that Num 15:39 bans the people of Israel from following their "heart" and "eyes." They are supposed to follow God's commandments, never what their hearts' and eyes' demand. According to Gen 3:6, Eve saw (ראה) the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and she felt that it was "good" (טוב) for "food" (מאכל); it was a delight (תאוה) to her eyes (עין) and was desirable (חמד) as a source of understanding (השכיל). Eve followed her eyes and heart, that is, her eyes' empirical observations and her minds' or heart's intellectual acuity.⁷⁶ Because of the dialogic contact with the voice from a Torah

75 Crenshaw, *Defending God*.

76 In other words, Eve followed rational intellect instead of God's commandment. Similarly, already in Eccl 2:10, Qohelet states that he followed what his eyes demanded and what his heart desired just like Eve. Also in Eccl 11:9, while the rational Qohelet advises readers to follow their hearts and eyes, he also warns readers of God's judgment as he is simultaneously influenced by the dialogic voice of the Torah discourse that condemns following of one's heart and eyes.

discourse, the sage Qohelet realizes that he, indeed, followed Eve's footsteps. Like Eve, the rational Qohelet, according to Eccl 2:10, did not refute what his eyes demanded (כל אשר שאלו עיני) and his *heart* took pleasure from all his toil (לבי שמח מכל-עמלי). Qohelet also emphasizes his empirical approach to obtaining knowledge by repeatedly stating that he *saw* all the things about which he talks. Under the dialogic influence of the voice from a Torah discourse, the sage Qohelet realizes humans' transgression against God, which permanently distorted human intellectuality.

In sum, as the voice from a Torah discourse and the Father's voice interpenetrate each other in Qohelet's consciousness, Qohelet realizes that Eve resembles the "strange woman." This sage Qohelet thus also regards Eve as an iconic figure of foolishness and disobedience, like the strange woman in Proverbs. What is more, for the sage Qohelet, Eve's "wisdom" is like his own "wisdom" because he recognizes his intellectuality as "accounting" (חשבון). Thus, he evaluates his "wisdom" as "contrivances" (חשבנות), which is far from true wisdom (חכמה). The Father's voice, in cooperation with the voice from a Torah discourse, helps Qohelet reconfigure Eve as a kind of "strange woman," who is nets, snares, fetters, and something bitter than death. All, including Qohelet himself, fall victim to her.

The association of Qohelet's wisdom with Eve's wisdom is evident in a further way. In Eccl 7:27, the text seems to feminize Qohelet to textually reinforce the connection between Qohelet's intellectual perversity and Eve's pursuit of knowledge. In other words, Eccl 7:27 has the verb *אמרה*—the third person feminine singular form—for the subject *קהלת*. Following LXX, scholars often emend the text as *אמר הקהלת* (cf. *אמרה קהלת*) to make the verb form third person masculine singular.⁷⁷ This emendation is understandable, because Qohelet is always used as a masculine noun in Ecclesiastes except for Eccl 7:27. Nevertheless, as Koosed rightly points out, "Qohelet is a feminine form" and it "retains its feminine side," which "unexpectedly emerge[s], like slips of the tongue."⁷⁸ The feminine singular verb, *אמרה*, in the text thus makes a textual connection between Qohelet and Eve, between his intellectual perversity and Eve's pursuit of knowledge. The text *feminizes* (or *female-personifies*) the pursuit of rational intellect using the female character, *האשה* (Eve), and reconfigures her as the "strange woman," who is also a feminine symbol of human characteristics, such as foolishness and disobedience. Qohelet was trapped in nets and snares of Eve/strange woman, and became like her; he incorporated

77 See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 269; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 264.

78 Koosed, *(Per)mutations of Qohelet*, 83.

her characteristics. The feminine singular verb form אמרה points to Qohelet's Eve/strange woman-like characteristics in terms of his intellectual perversity.⁷⁹

We can now understand the misogynic words in Eccl 7:26–28 in the context of Qohelet's wisdom's accessibility discourse. To fully justify these verses' relevance to the context, however, the translation of Eccl 7:28 requires a further discussion. According to NRSV, the passage may read: "(28a) which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. (28b) One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found." As Eaton puts it, the text may seem to say, "wisdom ... is rare in men, but rarer in women."⁸⁰ Most scholars similarly render it. Being unable to make Eccl 7:28 suitable for the context, Seow even concludes that v. 28b—"One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found"—is a secondary addition, "inadvertently incorporated" by a glossator.⁸¹ What this suggests is that without emending the text of v. 28b, the text as it stands cannot make sense in the context. As discussed, however, Qohelet is not talking about the rarity of wisdom in Eccl 7:23–8:1a but humans' lack of accessibility to wisdom. With the translation of NRSV and of many other scholars, Eccl 7:28 does not easily fit in the context. Thus, I propose to emend the text. Because the root מצא appears a number of times in Eccl 7:27–28, there is a chance that one of its appearances might have been inserted as dittography. The Hebrew text reads:

(27) ראה זה מצאתי אמרה קהלת אחת לאחת למצא חשבון
 (28) אשר עוד-בקשה נפשי ולא מצאתי אדם אחד מאלף מצאתי ואשה בכל-אלה לא
מצאתי

Among the five occurrences of מצא, the first person singular form appears four times, and three of them are in v. 28. Without emending the text, as mentioned, the text seems to discuss the rarity of wisdom rather than humans' lack of access to wisdom. If the middle מצאתי in v. 28, which I marked with a strikethrough line, is taken as dittography, however, the text can be rendered as:

79 This misogynic textual tactic is, of course, not unique in Ecclesiastes. A particularly notable text in traditional wisdom books is Ben Sira (Sir 9:2; 25:13–16; 24; 42:12–14; 47:19). As mentioned, Ben Sira, a roughly contemporary text to Ecclesiastes, reflects a kind of torah discourse that villainizes Eve, and Qohelet also seems to have come into contact with such a torah discourse. Moreover, feminizing a male character to negatively evaluate the person is not unknown in the Hebrew Bible. See Ken Stone, "Gender Criticism: The Un-Manning of Abimelech." In *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 183–201.

80 Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 116.

81 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 274.

“(27) See, this is what I found, said Qohelet, one by one, to find explanation (28) which my mind has sought repeatedly. And I have not found one man among a thousand; and a woman among all these I have not found.” The text now reveals human—both male and female—lack of accessibility to wisdom. To paraphrase, Qohelet might have said, “See, this is what I found; one by one, I have repeatedly tried to find the sum. And I found that I have not found one truly wise man among a thousand nor a woman among all these [did I find].” Qohelet wants us to see what “he found,” and what he found is that no one is wise. What seemed at first glance to be perhaps secondarily inserted misogynic words is, in fact, an utterance that addresses the issue of humans’ accessibility to wisdom. With this simple emendation, v. 28 supports the context of human’s inaccessibility to wisdom. The language of the whole unit, Eccl 7:23–8:1a, is so complex that its meaning does not emerge without close scrutiny, but this unit is also rich in literary art and theological reflection. Qohelet, under the dialogic influence of the Father’s voice and the voice from the Torah discourse, realizes humans’ intellectual perversity after Eve’s actions, and asserts that he found that no one is truly wise.

We should note, however, that Qohelet both as a sage and a rational thinker does not basically deny wisdom’s accessibility. As mentioned, the sage Qohelet’s claims about wisdom’s benefits presuppose humans’ accessibility to wisdom. Moreover, according to Eccl 2:10, following his eyes and heart is not a problem for the rational Qohelet. Thus, Qohelet explicitly declares that he, indeed, followed his eyes and heart despite the prohibitions. Therefore, we should remember that, with regard to the matter of wisdom’s accessibility, the Father’s voice and the voice of Rational Intellect are not always in conflict with each other. As the Father’s voice tries to solve the problem of social injustice that is undeniably the work of God, the Father’s voice, rather, contests against wisdom’s accessibility even though such an idea contradicts the foundational presupposition in the wisdom tradition. These voices are, therefore, not always merely conflicting one another. Rather, their dialogic relationship in Qohelet’s consciousness is complex, messy, and disorganized as these voices are interpenetrating one another in Qohelet’s consciousness making every word that he utters double-voiced. Even though Qohelet in Eccl 7:23–8:1a tries to deny wisdom’s accessibility in order to ultimately defend God’s justice, Qohelet’s rational voice constantly challenges those ideas inside of his mind, and the Father’s voice cannot but comply with the idea, at least in part.

5 Concluding Remarks

In his wisdom discourse, Qohelet's monologue is internally dialogized as he embraces multiple voices. Qohelet is both a sage and a rational thinker. He is also a pious person who is under the dialogic influence of a certain voice from a Torah discourse, and tries to defend God's justice and the divine order, which his rationality seriously undermines. The dialogue, however, happens not between two or more different characters but within Qohelet himself. Qohelet struggles with his own conflicting thoughts, but never mutes any voice in all his struggles. Thus, multiple voices unpredictably and unfinalizably author Qohelet's identity, interpenetrating each other in Qohelet's consciousness. Therefore, we need to sense the presence of multiple voice-layers in every word of Qohelet, even though the word seems to clearly represent just one voice. Just as it is Raskolnikov after all who alone speaks even when he resonates with others' consciousnesses in his dialogized interior monologue, it is Qohelet after all who alone speaks in his dialogized interior monologue. Qohelet's interior dialogue, therefore, generates complex emotions such as "bitter irony" or "indignation."⁸² Perhaps, for this reason, Qohelet claims that wisdom increases pain and vexation (Eccl 1:18) and repeatedly laments with impressive rhetoric, "הבל הבלים" (utter absurdity!) and "הכל הבל" (everything is absurd!).

82 Bakhtin imagines every word in a dialogized interior monologue double-voiced: "two voices are sounding simultaneously." Therefore, there rise complex and rich emotions such as "irony and indignation." Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 74–75.

Closing Without Finalizing

We explored Qohelet's contradictory utterances in Ecclesiastes. It was, indeed, an "exploration" in a jungle, where many readers have visited and from which they have returned with a plurality of observations. Most scholars in the past tried to see a coherent Qohelet under the spirit of modernism despite the contradictions. Pfeiffer, for instance, argues that as Qohelet "reached maturity and independence of thought he first doubted the validity of the current opinions [orthodox Judaism], and ... reached decidedly skeptical conclusions."¹ Pfeiffer asserts that "Ecclesiastes not only controverts the orthodox doctrine of God's just retribution of human deeds ... but also regarded Job's hope of a future vindication after death and Daniel's doctrine of a resurrection of the dead as utterly chimerical."² However, the opposite claim is equally possible. In fact, before Solomonic authorship was challenged, the "conservative" perspective in Ecclesiastes was often regarded as its major voice. For some scholars in the past, therefore, Solomon (or a character like Solomon) was believed to have utilized the so-called "unconventional" or "unorthodox" elements for his more "conventional" and "orthodox" lessons.³ Of course, as the date of composition is critically reviewed by modern scholars, Pfeiffer's position became a more preferred perspective. That is, modern Ecclesiastes scholarship tends to identify "skepticism" and "pessimism" with Qohelet's own voice and to marginalize the other perspective as a secondary voice that is meant to dilute radical elements with conservative ones. But this assumption, as Gordis points out, cannot answer the question, "Why would the ancient orthodox editors do that even though they could have easily suppressed the text?"⁴ Ecclesiastes is filled with provocative ideas compared to many other biblical texts, and if Ecclesiastes had been modified by editors and intentionally made acceptable to orthodox communities, the editors utterly failed to do so. Moreover, subordinating a perspective to the alleged main perspective essentially divides the book into two contradictory readings that invalidate each other.

What is more, even the scholars who tried to take the contradictions as they stand, which is surely an advance, were unable to accept the fact that Qohelet

1 Pfeiffer, "The Peculiar Skepticism of Ecclesiastes," 100.

2 Ibid., 102.

3 For an example of such an approach, see the survey of Ginsburg, *Cohleth*, 55–60. For a brief survey of ancient and medieval interpretations, see Fox, *Ecclesiastes קהלת*, xxv–xxviii.

4 Gordis, *Kohleth, the Man and His World*, 71. See also Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 25.

is a person of contradiction. Fox, for example, believes that the contradictions in Ecclesiastes lie in the disharmony between religious beliefs and real experiences—Qohelet is just a keen observer of such a discord and a teacher who tells us how to live in this absurd world.⁵ Perry's dialogic reading of Ecclesiastes also sets the contradictions as a battle between "experience" (K) and "faith" (P).⁶

But the problems of these readings that try to see the contradictions as they stand are not just their ascribing the contradictions to the discord of experience and faith but also their dichotomization of Qohelet's complex dialogic world—their simplistic schematization of the early Hellenistic period in the Second Temple Jewish society. For example, Murphy, like Fox and Perry, also claims that Qohelet is "groping through the conflicting facts of experience and belief."⁷ With the tendency to reduce what is genuinely complex into something simple and clear, not to mention the view that takes contradiction as a problem rather than an acceptable feature of any intelligent human (like Qohelet), the modernist scholarly discourse on Ecclesiastes has come to an impasse in dealing with the contradictions.

To overcome the limitations of modernism's way of dealing with Qohelet's contradictions, I suggested Bakhtin's literary, philosophical concept, dialogized interior monologue, as a model applicable to Qohelet's contradictory utterances. Through Bakhtin's insights, I demonstrated how we overcome modernist biases, approach the text anew, and embrace Qohelet's unfinalizable identity. Thus, I tried to discover some of the most vibrant voices in Qohelet's internal dialogue by locating him in his own context and surveying the discursive background as his cultural matrix where his dialogic contact with the voices were made. And I have finally shown the dialogic nature of Qohelet's contradictions with regard to his different evaluation of wisdom's worth and accessibility, the two most fundamental discourses in Qohelet's dialogized interior monologue on wisdom. We have seen that Qohelet is a sage. His wisdom fundamentally began with and was in some ways defined by submission to the Father's voice. But Qohelet's incorporation of rational intellect as a means of seeking empirical and logical knowledge places him in an irreversible process of "becoming" as Bakhtin might say. As discussed, Qohelet proclaims the uprightness of God's created world, stating that good things will come to those who fear God or the wise, while the ones who do not fear God cannot have such God's blessings (Eccl 8:12b–13). In his speculations on the world, however, Qohelet

⁵ See chap. 2, p. 29.

⁶ See chap. 2, pp. 30–31.

⁷ Roland E. Murphy, "The Pensées of Coheleth," *CBQ* 17, no. 2 (1955): 304–14.

contrarily states that it is not possible to straighten what is crooked, implying the crookedness of God's created world (Eccl 2:15). For Qohelet, wisdom is one of the things that he is most proud of among what he has, but he sometimes feels that he is completely isolated from true wisdom. As a consequence of his inner struggles, Qohelet sometimes promotes wisdom over everything but, at other times, prioritizes pleasure over everything. Qohelet sometimes seems just like the "father" in Proverbs, but he also seems like an Epicurean thinker. Or, at times, his identity appears to be someone provocative and conservative at the same time, unidentifiable within biblical traditions. Qohelet appears to be an exceptional intellectual but deeply agonized. We cannot know precisely how that becoming is processed in his consciousness because, as Bakhtin would insist, this becoming is messy, disorganized, unpredictable, and unfinalizable. Surely, Ecclesiastes exhibits unfinalizable dialogues of the voices, such as the Father's voice, the voice of Rational Intellect, the voice of the Victims, and the Apocalyptic voice. The voices' various interactions and interpenetration will never end and constantly invite us into Qohelet's ongoing struggles and pondering.

My project is, nonetheless, by no means comprehensive of all Qohelet's contradictions and all the voices that Qohelet incorporates in his utterances. What I would suggest to close this project here is, thus, that, through Bakhtin's notion of dialogized interior monologue, we can further explore various other voices and more fully understand the "becoming" of Qohelet's unfinalizable identity. Qohelet had dialogic contact with many voices that constructed his ways of thinking, his perceptions of the world, his understanding of God, and ultimately who Qohelet is. The text of Ecclesiastes, however, does not tell us what he eventually has become. Rather, we only see his unfinalizable contradictions, the process of his becoming something, and his unpredictable potentials.

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